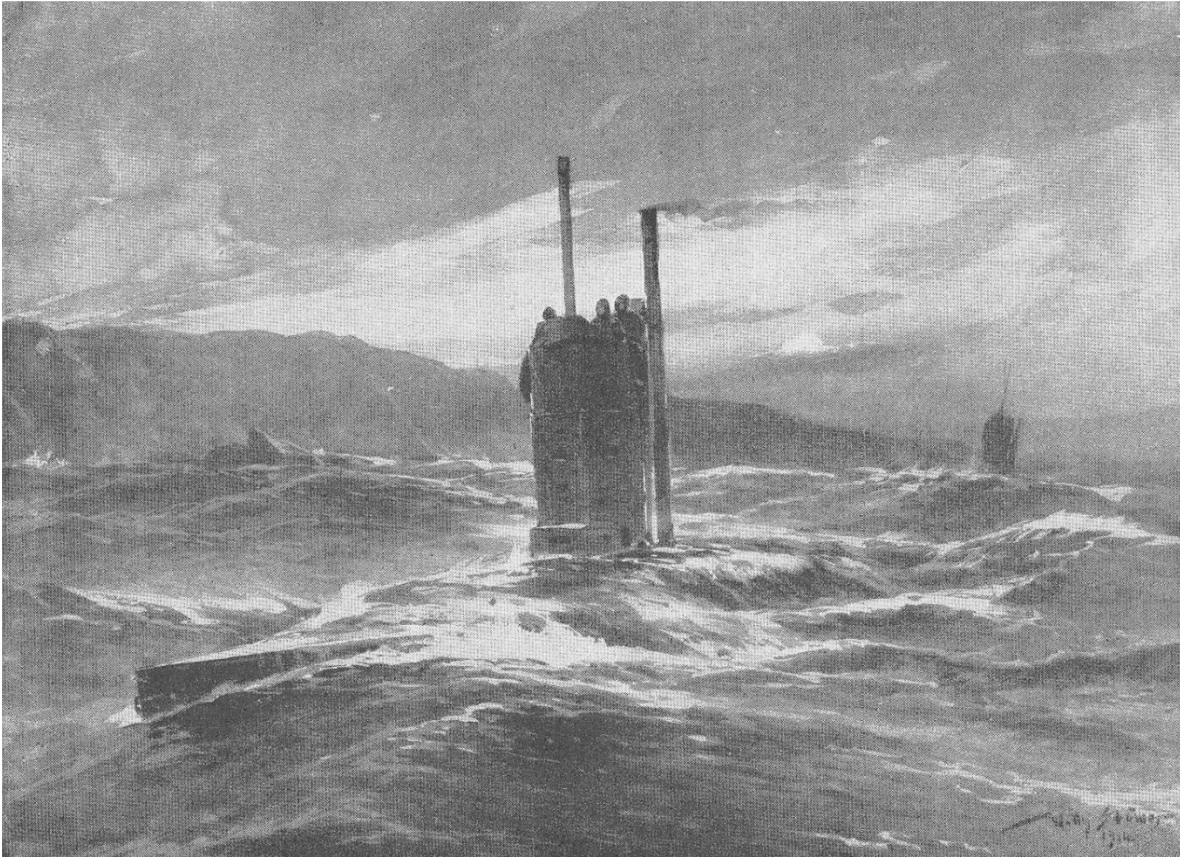


Germany Unleashes the U-Boats



Choosing Unrestricted Submarine Warfare,
1916-1917

A reader with primary documents

Edited by John Allen Gay

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Introduction

In the winter of 1916-1917, Imperial Germany's national-security elites came to a fateful decision: they would pursue unrestricted submarine warfare (USW) against ships in the waters around the British Isles. They chose this path knowing that it creates a serious risk of bringing the United States – the most powerful neutral – into the war. They had estimates from their Navy that unrestricted submarine warfare would force Britain out of the war within months. For many, this rendered the prospect of U.S. entry moot. They were wrong. Britain fought on, and America joined in. Germany lost the war. So why did the Kaiser's men choose as they did?

Before the Decision

1916 had been a "Year of Battles," shaped by massive, months-long campaigns at Verdun, on the Somme, and in Galicia. Germany was holding on the battlefield, but its strategic problems were the same problems it had been facing since the great offensive of 1914 had failed to knock France out of the war. Its foes had more people, more wealth, and more resources. An endless war could mean a slow death by attrition.

Worse, Britain's blockade hindered the Central Powers' access to food, fuel, and war materiel. Neutral America did not seriously challenge this blockade, but it did allow U.S.-made goods to flow to Britain and the rest of the Entente. Germany's allies were weak; offensives on their portions of the front usually only succeeded when German troops did the heavy lifting. And German leaders did not have a crystal ball to reveal the coming descent of Russia into revolution or the mutiny and unrest in France.

Enter the U-boat. German submariners had shown they could destroy ships carrying arms and supplies to England. The navy sang the new weapon's praises, and the army was running out of better ideas. However, the U-boat carried a political danger.

First, targeting British supply chains meant harming neutrals. Neutral ships carried goods to Britain. Neutral citizens rode on British passenger ships, ships that sometimes also carried arms or troops. Neutral ships were supposed to be able to go to any port not actively blockaded. Germany would have to stop the neutral ships or risk neutral commerce undermining the German blockade. Still, Germany believed that British prohibitions on neutral shipping to Germany already broke international law, and that Germany should not follow the law alone.

Second, the laws of war at sea were made for ships. Under the laws of the time, unarmed ships were not to be attacked without warning. Instead, the warship was to order the merchantman to halt and be searched. Merchant ships were only to be sunk after assuring the crew's safety. The armor and armament of a modern warship meant it could conduct such searches in relative safety.

Not so with submarines. These vessels protected themselves not with armor, but with stealth. If they surfaced to hail, halt, and inspect a suspicious merchant vessel, they made themselves

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vulnerable to gunfire and ramming. The British deepened this vulnerability with Q-Ships, armed ships disguised as unarmed merchantmen; a U-boat approaching for inspection would see a ship suddenly strike its neutral colors, run up a British flag, and open fire from multiple hidden guns.

Thus, a submarine campaign calculated to crush Britain's economy would face strong pressure to attack all ships approaching Britain, even neutrals, and to attack them without warning. The neutrals saw this as a cowardly assault on their rights and on the very lives of their citizens. Hundreds of Americans had already died in German submarine attacks by the end of 1916. Sinkings of ships like the *Lusitania*, *Arabic*, and *Sussex* had caused serial crises with Washington, with Germany often backing off and providing assurances, only to reverse itself later.

After the decision

The submarine campaign started strong. Within a few months, Britain suffered massive shipping losses. For several months, Germany's U-boats met or exceeded the rate of sinkings that the Navy had said they could deliver. It wasn't enough. Britain suffered some deprivation and rationing late in the war, but held on. Over the objections of the Royal Navy, Britain ordered merchant ships to travel in protected convoys. Sinkings slowed. Adjustments like these kept Britain going strong. The Kaiser's admirals were wrong that they could starve England out of the war.

Meanwhile, the United States entered the war on April 6, 1917. The U.S. Navy was quickly in action against the U-boats, contributing to the campaign's failure. Still, the Germans were right that America would be slow to mobilize for the land war. The American Expeditionary Force would not be a major factor on the Western Front for another year. Its anticipated arrival would inspire another German attempt to force Britain out: the great Spring Offensive of 1918.

This second roll of the dice failed, too: Germany pushed the Entente back but did not break it. That offensive, too, came at a high cost: it burned up Germany's best troops, leaving them outnumbered and outgunned. It was only at the end of September 1918 that Germany's generals advised the Kaiser that the war was lost. As the Imperial Army fell back and revolution spread, Germany was forced into a total surrender. The allies would dictate the terms of the peace. In some of these documents, one sees the early rumblings of the hatred, resentment, and finger-pointing that would tear down the Weimar Republic; two of the memoirists (Ludendorff and Bauer) were involved in putsches.

This reader looks at Germany's choice of unrestricted submarine warfare through a parliamentary report and the memoirs of several figures close to the decision. All of these are retrospective and thus could contain some distortions of the record, yet even so the variance in their perspective and reasoning is apparent. The parliamentary report is also noteworthy as a product of the first Weimar legislature; it served as one piece of a legislative inquiry into the war that would continue until shut down by the Nazis in 1932.

We will hear from several players:

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1. Karl Helfferich, Vice-Chancellor, Secretary of State for the Interior, and former Secretary of State for the Treasury. Helfferich was an opponent of the unrestricted submarine warfare decision and considered resigning in its wake.
2. Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, Chancellor since 1909.
3. Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, victor at Tannenberg and Chief of the General Staff. With Ludendorff, he had been called in to replace Erich von Falkenhayn. Both he and Ludendorff enjoyed strong public popularity.
4. General Erich Ludendorff, First Quartermaster General and eminence grise at Hindenburg's powerful headquarters. In addition to victories in the East, Ludendorff had led the assault on the Belgian fortress of Liege, the critical point for the Schlieffen Plan's advance.
5. Colonel Max Bauer, a staff officer under Ludendorff.

You will see passing references to, among others, von Jagow and Zimmerman (successive Secretaries for Foreign Affairs during this period), von Tirpitz and von Capelle (successive Secretaries of the Navy), Franz Conrad von Hotzendorf (Austrian Chief of Staff), and Burian and Czernin (successive Austrian Foreign Ministers). Young Charles succeeds Austria's Franz Joseph in late 1916. Gerard is Wilson's ambassador to Germany; Lansing, his Secretary of State. Bernstorff is Germany's ambassador to the United States.

We will also read, in passing, of how the decision to initiate unrestricted submarine warfare interacted with U.S. president Woodrow Wilson's efforts to promote a diplomatic resolution of the war. Several of the memoirists offer their assessments of Wilson's maneuvers.

Key Questions for Discussion

1. What role did the following factors play in the choice of unrestricted submarine warfare?
 - a. Military and economic assessments of the campaign's prospects
 - b. Internal German politics
 - i. Relations among the top decisionmakers
 - ii. The Reichstag
 - iii. The German public
 - c. German foreign relations
 - i. Relations with the United States
 - ii. Relations with Germany's allies
 - d. Individual decisionmakers' beliefs and biases
2. How did the different actors assess the intentions of the United States? Did the United States understand its own intentions as they did?
3. Were those who did not see the peace feelers as credible or serious correct?
4. Helfferich asserts that Hindenburg and Ludendorff said they would take responsibility for the outcome of the decision. Do their memoirs take responsibility?
5. What do you make of Helfferich and Bethmann-Holweg's decision not to resign?
6. Could USW's opponents have made different choices that would have prevented it?
7. Was USW the correct decision in the circumstances?
8. What can we take away from this for the present?

Majority Report

of the Second Subcommittee of the Committee of Inquiry

on President Wilson's Peace Move of 1916–1917 and the Opening of Unrestricted U-boat Warfare

Majority Report (Findings and Conclusion) and the Minority Report of Delegate Schultz-Bromberg

Excerpted from Official German Documents Relating to the World War, vol. I, pp. 125–166 (National Assembly Committee of Inquiry, Berlin, 1920)

Introduction

The present report completes the inquiry into the peace move of President Wilson in the winter of 1916–17, and therewith, for the first time, an official German politico-parliamentary investigation.

At its session of August 20, 1919, the National Assembly appointed, under the authority of Article 34 of the Constitution of the German Realm, a committee of inquiry consisting of twenty-eight members, with the duty of determining:

1. What circumstances led to the outbreak of the war, caused its prolongation, and brought about its losses; in particular—
2. What opportunities existed during the continuance of the war for bringing about peace parleys, and why such opportunities were brought to naught;
3. Whether, in the intercourse between the political offices of the government, between its political and its military management, and with the parliament or its representatives, good faith and probity were observed;
4. Whether, in the military and political conduct of the war, measures not in accord with the law of nations or measures cruel or harsh beyond any military or political necessity were directed or permitted.

The Committee of Inquiry thereupon decided to appoint four subcommittees, and to commit to the Second Subcommittee the investigation into the possibilities of peace according to Article No. 2 of the resolution of appointment passed by the National Assembly.

This Subcommittee took the peace move of Wilson as the object of its first investigation and opened at a public session on the 21st of October, after a review of the pertinent documents at the Foreign Office through its official recording secretary, Deputy Dr. Sinzheimer, with the examination of the last German Ambassador to Washington, Count Bernstorff. The examination of the responsible German statesmen was carried through thirteen sessions, at the last of which, on the 17th of November, the committee made known its intention to suspend for some time its public sessions after the hearing of the representatives of the Army command on the following day.

The investigation of the documentary evidence was being carried on concurrently with the hearings, and it appeared to be expedient to publish the results of this documentary examination before the resumption of the public hearings. In order to make possible the forming of an

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independent opinion abroad which was not dependent upon the reports of newspapers, simultaneous publication in German, French, and English was contemplated. The first of the documents appeared in German and English, on the 22d of January, 1920, as Part I of the Supplements to the Stenographic Minutes. The French edition had to be delayed on account of technical difficulties. Parts II, III, and IV of the Supplements also were delayed, on account of the Kapp coup, until April 22, appearing then in German and English. Part V appeared on May 24, and Part VI is published simultaneously with the present report.

For the purposes of this voluminous inquiry the documents of the Foreign Office, the Chancery, the Ministry of the Interior, the Admiralty Staff, the General Headquarters, and the Ministry of War have been drawn upon. By far the most important material came from the archives of the Foreign Office, from which all documents published in the supplements are derived, except when another source is indicated. To the heads of the office as well as to their designated agencies are due the thanks of the committee for the loyal manner in which they assisted and forwarded its labor, thereby making its smooth progress possible.

The closing of the session of the National Assembly on the 29th of April, contrary to its original expectation, as the result of the advanced election date, made the resumption of the public hearings on a broad scale impossible. Indeed, the committee believes itself justified in dispensing with them, inasmuch as the mass of documentary material presented herewith in its entirety in connection with the results of the hearings, offers a sufficient answer to the questions which were the subject of its investigation. Even if on some minor points complete elucidation has not been reached, these points are without weight in the formation of a general judgment on the question of the peace move. Some of the misunderstandings and confusions that arose were cleared up at an open hearing of Ambassador Count Bernstorff held on April 14. A series of likewise-deferred provisional hearings failed to develop material useful to the peace move investigation, except for the declarations of the former military attaché at Washington, Major v. Papen, which are embodied in Part V of the Supplements.

Thereafter it was possible to advance rapidly to the preparation of the report, and at the session of June 8, 1920, the recording secretary, Deputy Dr. Sinzheimer, presented a first draft. To this draft were added, at the session of June 18, the circumstantial opinions of the four experts. After hearing these opinions the committee on the same day constructed its final report on the basis of the draft of the recording secretary. The material additions to the draft are distinguished in the final report by italics, and the cancellations made by the committee are printed as notes, so that it is possible for the reader to find in the final report of the committee the draft thereof on which the opinions of the experts are based.

The report is agreed to by six of the seven members of the committee: Deputy Schultz-Bromberg, who, on the 8th of June had taken the place of Deputy Warmuth on the committee, found himself unable to agree with the other members and set forth his views in the minority report published coincidentally. The committee was no longer able to take cognizance of this minority report.

The committee has seriously endeavored to keep itself free from the influence of party politics while engaged in its work. Proof of this is evident in the choice of the experts selected, of whom two, the university professors Privy Councilor Dr. Schaefer and Professor Dr. Hoetzsch, belong to the German National People's Party, and one, Professor Dr. Bonn, to the German Democratic Party, while the party affiliation of former Minister v. Romberg is not known to the committee. The opinions of three of the experts are in substantial agreement with the draft of the recording

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secretary. In the final draft of the report it was possible to give great consideration to such of their scruples as seemed to be of importance.

Thus the committee may lay claim to having drawn up its report without regard to the fear or favor of any political party.

Gothein,
Chairman.

Berlin, *June 23, 1920.*

Report

on President Wilson's Peace Move of 1916–1917¹

I. The Task

It can not be the purpose of the report to give a connected and literal story of Wilson's peace move. For this purpose reference must be made to the official records and the investigations of the Second Subcommittee.

The purpose of the report consists in this, to collate the material results of the inquiries which have been conducted, and thereupon to submit an answer to the questions which have been propounded to the committee.

At the same time (and in this connection) the report must be limited to facts which have a direct bearing on the Wilson peace move, and must avoid all those subjects which have been made points of investigation in the course of the inquiry into this move without standing in an absolutely direct relation to it.

II. The Point of Departure

Our point of departure is the fundamental fact that the peace move was instigated by us and desired by us. The fundamental instructions regarding the same were promulgated by the Chancellor acting in mutual accord with the Emperor and the Supreme High Command in the summer and autumn of 1916, following a more or less casual interchange of opinions regarding a possible interposition by Wilson in connection with the peace question—on the occasion, for instance, of the presence of Colonel House in Berlin—and after Wilson had indicated, ever since the time of his peace note of August 10, 1914,² his willingness “to act in the interest of peace.”

¹The Report is to be read in connection with the draft submitted in the session of the 8th of June, 1920, by Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer. The material changes adopted by the committee in the session of June 18, 1920, after the opinions of the experts had been submitted, are characterized as follows: (a) Additions made to the text are in italics; (b) Cancellations are reported in the form of notes.

²Wilson's note (of August 5, 1914) is printed in the New York Times for August 6, 1914.—Editor.

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There was, too, a community of agreement between Berlin and Washington with regard to the form of the peace move. Bernstorff announced that Wilson desired to take no part in territorial questions and, on the contrary, that his interest was limited to disarmament and the freedom of the seas; that Wilson had in mind a conference at The Hague, at which the United States and the other neutral Powers should only take part to the extent required by the two questions above referred to; that Wilson wished to play the part of the peacemaker; that he desired to win the distinction of having brought the belligerents to the point of being willing to enter into negotiations with one another.³ Accordingly, states the Chancellor, we should be very willing to consider any interposition on the part of the President which might lead to the commencement of peace negotiations between the belligerents. He asks that the activities of the President directed toward this end be energetically encouraged. He points out that it would be improper to demand that we should commit ourselves to the acceptance of any peace conditions by the mere fact of acceding to such interposition. He is of the opinion that a general peace conference following in the wake of peace negotiations conducted by the belligerents and not devoid of results, having for its purpose the discussion of questions of international law as well as those arising between nation and nation, in which the neutral Powers would participate, would be acceptable if need be.⁴

The Imperial Government clung to the thought of a peace move by Wilson and constantly endeavored to influence him toward this end. Even on the 20th and the 26th of November, 1916, Wilson's peace move was keenly desired.⁵ As a proof of the keenness of this desire to bring about peace through the instrumentality of Wilson, particular reference may be made to the telegram of the Chancellor to Bernstorff on the 14th of October.⁶ This contained the proposal that Wilson cooperate with the Pope, the King of Spain and the neutral Powers of Europe in order to start the peace move in operation.

On November 21, 1916, Bernstorff announced that Wilson desired to take steps leading to peace negotiations at the very earliest possible moment, presumably between that date and the New Year, interposing the condition, however, that during this period we should refrain as much as possible from expressing ourselves either orally or in writing on the subject of peace negotiations, in order to avoid the possibility of a premature opposition on the part of our enemies. According to Bernstorff, everything was set for the peace move on the 4th of December,⁷ though the Ambassador expressed an opinion that, taking Wilson's character into consideration, it was still doubtful as to when he would act; that the authorities in Washington were in favor of the move, that it might come overnight, particularly if it were possible for us to assume a conciliatory attitude in the matter of the Belgian question.⁸ Speaking in Wilson's behalf, the American chargé d'affaires

³13, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 979.

⁴14, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 981.

⁵For instance, 16, 19, 21, 23, 29, 34, 35, Supplements, pt. I, post, pp. 983, 984, 986, 989, 991, 994, 996.

⁶23, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 989.

⁷33, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 993.

⁸38, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 997.

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declared to the Imperial Chancellor on December 5 that the President was hard at work on an early and energetic move, the purpose of which was the early establishment of peace, and to this end he asked the cooperation of the German Government.⁹

III. The Peace Proposal of the Central Powers of December 12, 1916

On the 12th of December, 1916, came the peace proposal of the Central Powers. The question arises how, in the face of the negotiations with America, *and in opposition to the specifically expressed desire of Wilson that the peace move which he had in contemplation should not be interfered with by anything which we might do*,¹⁰ an individual peace move, of which Wilson had not been informed, could have been initiated.

Bethmann-Hollweg called attention in the course of his examination to the fact that it was not certain when or even whether the proposed peace move of Wilson would become an accomplished fact; so that, for this reason if for no other, individual action on the part of the Central Powers was required by the situation, and all the more so because such action enabled them to choose their own time. As a matter of fact it was doubtful when definite action by Wilson would be taken. And, moreover, Bernstorff's last communication that action on the part of Wilson was unquestionably imminent, was still qualified by the doubt as to when Wilson's purpose would take the form of action. This delay was perhaps to be attributed to Wilson's temperament. But it was also certainly attributable, as the reports from Bernstorff show, to the fact that incidents were constantly occurring which made it appear to Wilson impossible to commence the peace move which he had planned without having American public opinion against him. This was due particularly to the various U-boat incidents which were constantly occurring during the course of the negotiations for Wilson's peace move, and to the Belgian deportations, which created in America an extremely unfavorable opinion against Germany. On this point, Lansing's announcement reported by Bernstorff on the 1st of December, 1916, is characteristic. It reads as follows:

In conversation Lansing laid great stress upon the American protest against the Belgian deportations. That on account of this the entire Belgian relief movement was jeopardized and that, further, opinion on this side of the water was becoming unfavorably colored and this at the precise moment when it looked as if peace negotiations might be undertaken. Lansing stated that it was his opinion that if the Imperial Government could find a way to meet the protests of the neutral Powers with regard to the Belgian question, this would create an impression which would weigh tremendously in our favor, and that it would, in all probability, result in the immediate possibility of taking up the first steps leading to peace negotiations. That, unfortunately, up to the present time, it has always happened that some obstacle came in the way.

Especially, however, does Wilson's hesitation become really comprehensible when we take into consideration Bernstorff's reports.¹¹ According to these reports, Wilson was willing to begin a move for peace only if it should appear that the Entente were in a receptive mood. Bernstorff assumes, as may be deduced from his testimony, that Wilson had come into touch with the Entente

⁹210, Supplements, pt. VI, post, p. 1305.

¹⁰Inserted in the draft of Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer, recording secretary.

¹¹37, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 997.

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on the question of peace. Bethmann-Hollweg too was depending on this. On November 27, 1916, he writes Hindenburg:¹²

President Wilson has informed Count Bernstorff confidentially that it is his intention to put forth an appeal for peace in the time elapsing between now and the New Year. Whether he will really carry out his purpose remains wholly uncertain. He is undecided and fearful of a set-back. We must reckon on this, that he will only issue his appeal if he no longer feels certain that the Entente will meet it with a curt rejection, and that means if the Entente finds itself in a situation where it would not be likely to meet a peace proposal emanating from us with a curt refusal.

Therein lay precisely the great significance of Wilson's proposed move. If it were to take place, it could certainly be assumed that he had been in touch with the Entente or, at any rate, that his action was the outcome of a reasonable hope that it would meet with a favorable reception.

Wilson's hesitation alone could therefore hardly be considered as constituting a justification for action initiated solely by Germany. The preponderating reasons for turning the scale in favor of the individual move were to be sought in the general situation in which Germany was at that time, as well as in the weight attributed to it by the political department of the government. Beginning with the first of the year 1916 an urgent necessity had existed for Germany to find as soon as possible some means of coming to an understanding with the enemy.

According to the opinion of the highest authorities, the military situation was such even at that time as to eliminate the possibility of a military victory on land. Baron Burian's appeal of October 17, 1916, directed to the announcement of peace proposals, does not constitute the only basis for the above assertion.¹³ This is made particularly clear in the opinions of the military leaders themselves. For example, Bethmann-Hollweg as early as January 4, 1916, repeats an assertion of General v. Falkenhayn, then Chief of the General Staff, according to which the war could not be brought to an end by military blows inflicted by the land forces.¹⁴ Bethmann-Hollweg expresses himself to the same effect in a letter to Secretary of State v. Jagow on March 5, 1916.¹⁵ Ludendorff takes the same stand, as appears from a report of Secretary of Legation v. Lersner to the Foreign Office of December 22, 1916.¹⁶ Therefore, the weapon of unrestricted U-boat warfare came under consideration as the sole means of accomplishing peace through a military triumph. The Admiralty Staff, and the Supreme High Command as well, believed in the certain success of this weapon.

Because of this, the former had already long since been urging the commencement of unrestricted U-boat warfare. The Supreme High Command had, in any event, since the beginning of December, 1916, determined to pursue the same course. Not only does this appear from the telegram of

¹²86, Supplements, pt. II, post, p. 1068.

¹³75, Supplements, pt. II, post, p. 1053.

¹⁴145, Supplements, pt. IV, post, p. 1116.

¹⁵150, Supplements, pt. IV, post, p. 1139.

¹⁶177, Supplements, pt. IV, post, p. 1200.

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Counselor of Legation v. Grünau to the Foreign Office of December 1, 1916,¹⁷ according to which Hindenburg, in reply to Mr. v. Heydebrand, seems to have taken a fairly firm stand in regard to an early inauguration of unrestricted U-boat warfare, but especially indeed from the notes of the Hindenburg interview with the Emperor on December 8, 1916, in which the commencement of unrestricted U-boat warfare by the end of January was asked for.¹⁸ As opposed to this, the political branch took the stand that unrestricted U-boat warfare would be fatal for Germany; that, in the words of Helfferich, reasserted later by Admiral v. Holtzendorff, it would lead to ruin.¹⁹

In the face of this situation it followed that, in any event, the task of the political branch should consist in bringing about a friendly understanding at the earliest possible moment, since there was no other military means in contemplation competent to bring about peace by force of arms. The political branch also and in particular had to determine the question of how, if possible, the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat warfare, which was being urged by military circles, could be avoided by bringing about peace negotiations. It was precisely this last question which claimed the full attention of v. Bethmann-Hollweg in his deliberations concerning further advancement along the line of peace. Bethmann-Hollweg recognized the possibility that an answer might result from a German peace proposal which would prove to be the loom on which the peace fabric might be woven.

As he states in his remarks before the committee, "Such an answer would have given the political department of the government the opportunity to successfully combat that momentous decision which from the year 1915 was suspended above it like the sword of Damocles and which, as a matter of fact, constituted a still greater menace as the number of our U-boats increased and the technical arguments against the U-boats became fewer and fewer—in short, I say, that such an answer would have put it within the power of the German Government to successfully combat, by invoking the possibilities of peace, that decision which was reached on the 9th of January and which it considered disastrous."²⁰

Bethmann-Hollweg considered the course of a peace move on the part of Germany as all the more justifiable, in that he could not perceive in such an individual peace proposal anything to interfere with the efforts of Wilson for peace. The individual peace proposal might even, as Bethmann-Hollweg believed, advance Wilson's move and bring about cooperation. It was to this effect that Bernstorff was instructed on December 9, 1916, with regard to the meaning of the impending peace proposals of the Central Powers, for the purpose of communicating them to Wilson.²¹ Bethmann-

¹⁷170, Supplements, pt. IV, post, p. 1181.

¹⁸89, Supplements, pt. II, post, p. 1071.

¹⁹212, Supplements, pt. VII, post, p. 1317.

²⁰Stenographic Minutes, 4th sess., post, p. 334.

²¹39, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 998.

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Hollweg believed, as he stated in his testimony, that by this means he would have “two irons in the fire” in the interest of peace.²²

*It must be assumed in any case, that Secretary of State Zimmermann did not share this view of the Chancellor's, for he stated later before the Budget Committee that Wilson was to be eliminated as a peace mediator by the peace proposal of the 12th of December.*²³

IV. Wilson's Peace Note of December 21, 1916

As a matter of fact, the individual peace proposal of the Central Powers did not interfere with the peace move of Wilson. On the 21st of December, 1916, the American chargé d'affaires delivered to Secretary of State Zimmermann the official peace note of Wilson, to the terms of which further reference will be made. Its contents coincided with the general outlines which had been contemplated in connection with a peace move on Wilson's part, according to the negotiations between Berlin and Washington. The virtual essence of the note was its appeal made to all the belligerent Powers to make their war aims known so that they might be openly compared.

It may be (says Wilson) that the terms which the belligerents on the one side and on the other would deem it necessary to insist upon are not so irreconcilable as some have feared; that an interchange of views would clear the way at least for conference and make the permanent concord of the nations a hope of the immediate future, a concert of nations immediately practicable.

The President refrains from proposing a peace; he does not even offer his interposition. He only asks, as stated in his note, “that soundings be taken in order that we may learn, the neutral nations with the belligerent, how near the haven of peace may be for which all mankind longs with an intense and increasing longing.”

Wilson's appeal to have the war aims made public received a special impetus through a request of Lansing's to Bernstorff which is made the subject of the Ambassador's dispatch on the 21st of December, 1916.²⁴ Lansing announced to Bernstorff that the American Government was looking for frank replies from the belligerents with regard to their individual peace conditions. He added at the suggestion of Bernstorff that such declarations could also be considered confidential and so lead gradually to a conference.

Wilson's appeal, as appears from the report of the Viennese Ambassador of December 17, 1916,²⁵ received the official support of the Pope. According thereto the Pope had commissioned the Nuncio at Vienna to inform the Imperial German Government that “he had good ground to believe that the Entente was inclined to peace negotiations, if we would disclose ‘something’ concerning

²²In the draft of Recording Secretary Dr. Sinzheimer, there is here inserted: “Whether the peace proposal actually fulfilled this function, and whether the fundamental purpose which was hereafter interbound with the peace proposal, was firmly adhered to, is to be seen later on.”

²³Added by the committee to the draft of Reporter Dr. Sinzheimer.

²⁴45, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1004.

²⁵99, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1079.

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our peace conditions; that the Entente was particularly interested in a guarantee for the restoration and complete independence of Belgium.”

In any event the Ambassador also mentioned reports, on December 19, 1916, that Baron Burian characterizes the above-mentioned communication of the Pope partly of no value and partly as a confirmation of “our impressions.”²⁶ What is meant thereby is not quite clear. In any event, Baron Burian was reputed to be opposed to any peace negotiations through Wilson, and this for reasons very frankly reported by the aforesaid Ambassador on December 3, 1916.²⁷ Moreover, the significance of the papal communication is emphasized by additional documents which, on account of neutral States, can not be quoted from here. *They have been submitted to the subcommittee, and it can not share the opinion of Expert v. Romberg with regard to the immateriality of the papal action.*²⁸

If we analyze the situation as it reveals itself in connection with the German peace proposal after the issuance of Wilson's peace note, it can be stated that Bethmann's tactical purpose “to have two irons in the fire” was as a matter of fact put into operation. Wilson's peace note was so constructed as to place itself in an intimate connection with the German peace proposal. This latter had only spoken about the war aims of Germany in very general terms. The idea was to present them in detail on the occasion of a conference. Wilson, on his part, volunteered to accept the disclosure of these war aims and to prepare for a conference in which they should be discussed. The answer to Wilson's peace note was capable of bringing about a further and more effective stride along the line of peace development. At the same time the answer was, fortunately, the means of putting in the background many an unfavorable impression resulting not only from the manner in which the peace proposal was drawn up, but particularly from a public speech of the Emperor on the 13th of December, 1916, which was published as the result of an unexplained discretion, and making clear to all the world, in no uncertain tone, particularly with regard to the Belgian question, the existence of Germany's desire for peace, which was almost despaired of abroad.

Germany answered Wilson's peace note by its note of December 26, 1916. This note avoided in diplomatic form the essential point of Wilson's peace note. The reasons for this action are to be found in pertinent documents. Particularly in this regard shall we call attention to the orders and messages of Secretary of State Zimmermann.²⁹

It is a significant circumstance that after the issuance of the German peace proposal, the Embassy in Madrid as well as the legations at The Hague, Berne, Copenhagen, Christiania and Stockholm were inaccurately informed that at no moment during the conduct of the war had an attempt been made to influence the United States in the direction of making proposals for mediation.

But this can be explained by the fact that the German Imperial Government did not wish to make known, for tactical reasons, the actual facts with regard to the origin of Wilson's peace note, both on its own account as well as in the interests of America, and because, as a matter of fact, a peace

²⁶100, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1079.

²⁷88, Supplements, pt. II, post, p. 1070.

²⁸Inserted by the committee in the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer.

²⁹105, 108, 109, Supplements, pt. III, post, pp. 1085, 1087, 1088.

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mediation technically construed from the standpoint of international law, could not be accepted as a subject of discussion. The meager and, to a certain extent, inaccurate announcements of the public press after the fact of Wilson's peace note had been made public, are surprising. His action was simply defined as an autocratic meddling on his part in our affairs, WHICH MUST BE PROHIBITED, in spite of the fact that Bethmann-Hollweg had actually been instrumental in bringing it about. For the above we rely mainly upon the testimony of Editor in Chief Georg Bernhard, whose accuracy in all material matters has not been challenged by Secretary of State Zimmermann, who handled the matter in the press conference.³⁰ Finally, it must be noted that the Ambassador at Vienna, on the 26th day of December, 1916, was in a position to report to the Foreign Office that, on the strength of a telephonic conversation with Berlin, he had told Count Czernin that a telegram from Washington indicated that Wilson was exerting himself to stop the calling of a conference in order to get personal control of the peace move.³¹ We have not before us any Washington telegram of this description. Wilson's peace move was in keeping with the demands which we ourselves had made. His note of the 21st of December, 1916, is, according to its terms, drawn up with the purpose of bringing about a conference, not of standing in the way of one.

The testimony of Secretary of State Zimmermann before the investigation committee has not resulted in an explanation of all these events.³² We are compelled to accept the view that the purpose of all these announcements was to cover up all traces of the origin of Wilson's call for peace, in order not to become subjected to the disagreeable consequences resulting from earlier individual plans which were the very ones that had made this appeal a feature of the general peace plan.³³

Moreover, Zimmermann's telegram to the Ambassador at Vienna of December 23, 1916,³⁴ makes it perfectly clear that, in contradistinction to the policy of the author of the answer to Wilson's note up to this time, the purpose for the future was to be the elimination of Wilson's interposition. The message characterizes Wilson's peace move just as does a telegraphic communication of Hindenburg's of even date,³⁵ in a manner entirely wide of the mark, in that it expresses the possibility that it was adopted in connection with an understanding with Great Britain, whereas

³⁰91, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1074. In the draft of Recording Secretary Dr. Sinzheimer, there was inserted the following: "To the same effect were the meager, and for the most part incorrect reports of the newspapers after the peace note came to be known. The peace note is not described as the result of spontaneous wishes consistently carried out, but as an autocratic meddling on the part of Wilson in matters in which he had a personal interest, which could not be tolerated."

³¹Inserted by the committee in the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer.

³²Stenographic Minutes, 5th sess., post, p. 405.

³³112, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1089.

³⁴105, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1085.

³⁵178, Supplements, pt. IV, post, p. 1201.

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the truth is that it was due to representations made by Germany. The particular passage referred to reads as follows:

It is possible that the peace activities of President Wilson are the result of an understanding with Great Britain in order to make it easier for the Entente to find a way out of the cul-de-sac in which it has gotten as a result of the public announcements of its statesmen. We have all the more reason for not allowing the initiative in the peace question to be again taken away from us. A response given as soon as possible, agreeing with the step taken by the President, will make the answering of the note of the Entente easier for us, in case the latter should be of the same tenor as the utterances of Lloyd George. An answer, say, of the following import would also eliminate intervention by President Wilson.

From this stand, it can be concluded as being beyond doubt that the political branch of the government had changed its attitude with regard to Wilson, and that the tactical purpose of having “two irons in the fire” had been given up.

The reasons for the altered attitude of the Imperial Government are to be found in this, that in the meantime the movement which demanded the commencement of an unrestricted U-boat warfare for the purpose of bringing about a termination of the war by a military victory had become dominant. This movement had no interest in any peace move by Wilson, in fact looked upon this peace move as an interference which should be rendered inoperative. Only a short time after publication of Wilson's peace note, Hindenburg had expressed himself to this effect in a detailed telegram directed to the Foreign Office. The conspicuous change in the Imperial policy in the face of a peace move on the part of Wilson can only be explained on the assumption that the policy in question yielded to that sentiment. If this is correct, it is obvious that the plan of breaking up the U-boat movement by the interposition of an individual peace move was brought to naught, and not only this, but that Wilson's peace move which had been made the subject of much effort was hereby made difficult in the extreme if not rendered altogether impossible.

*For the answer which the peace proposal of the 12th of December elicited from Germany's enemies created a situation which subjected the working out of Wilson's peace move to an influence which proved fatal. In this connection the subcommittee agrees throughout with the views expressed concurrently in the opinions of Messrs. v. Romberg, Bonn, and Hoetzsch in the premises.*³⁶

V. The Ninth of January, 1917

*In the meantime, Wilson continued with his efforts for peace.*³⁷ On January 3, 1917, a telegram of Bernstorff of the 29th of December, 1916,³⁸ was received in Berlin, according to which Colonel House, acting together with Wilson, asked for confidential information concerning the conditions of peace. It was not until the 7th of January, 1917—two days before the decision regarding the

³⁶Inserted by the committee in the draft of Recording Secretary Dr. Sinzheimer.

³⁷This paragraph began as follows in the draft of Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer, the recording secretary: “In spite of the determination to set at naught any further interposition on Wilson's part, the latter continued his attempt to proceed with the peace move.”

³⁸50, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1010.

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opening of an unrestricted U-boat war—that Zimmermann answered this new appeal.³⁹ The Ambassador was instructed to handle the question concerning our communication of our peace conditions in a dilatory fashion. He was to state that we were convinced that we were able to bring the war to a victorious end, both from a military as well as a political or commercial standpoint. In addition to this, it was to be announced that we were inclined, after peace was concluded, to take part in a general conference dealing with the settlement of international legal questions in which Wilson was interested, and to state that, so far as Belgium was concerned, we “shall not annex Belgium.”

We have reached the point at which it is proper to insert a brief remark concerning the question of the expediency of communicating definite peace conditions, because this question frequently played a prominent part at the hearings. Bethmann-Hollweg in particular took the ground that either an open or a confidential communication of definite peace aims would not have been expedient, except in dealing directly with the enemy himself, because such information would have disclosed our hand. On the other hand, attention may be called to the following point: There are circumstances under which it would be injurious to give full information concerning such conditions if negotiations are just beginning or if the enemy is prepared therefor. If he is not ready for negotiations, then the real question to be considered is how he can be brought to the state of mind where he will be ready for them. One method of bringing about such readiness for negotiation is precisely the setting out of one's own purpose, the practical working out of which is the end and aim of the negotiations. For the rest, Bethmann-Hollweg finally, on the 29th of January, 1917, informed Wilson of the conditions of peace. By doing this, he himself finally recognized the expediency of giving such information.

But already at the time of answering the telegram of the 29th of December, 1916, which had arrived on January 3, 1917, Bethmann-Hollweg gives evidence of vacillation. The records contain the draft of a telegram to Count Bernstorff written by the Chancellor himself on January 4, 1917, giving him the power to communicate to House and Wilson, under the conditions of the most absolute discretion and in limited and literal outline, the main points of our peace conditions. This instruction was not sent.⁴⁰ It was supplanted by Zimmermann's message of January 7, 1917, already referred to, according to which here, too, at the instance of the Supreme High Command and at the eleventh hour, the pledge with regard to the provisional restoration of Belgium to which we have referred above was stricken out.⁴¹

If the German answer of the 7th of January, 1917, avoided the issue of the American endeavors, these tactics do not, in the last analysis, hark back to considerations of expediency of a general order, but to the decision regarding the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat warfare which was imminent. On the 8th of January, 1917, the military leaders had met in council with Hindenburg and had determined unanimously upon the unconditional carrying-out of the

³⁹53, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1012.

⁴⁰72, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1048.

⁴¹The draft of Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer, the recording secretary, stated at this point: “That the communication of this information was without result, is attributable to the fact that it occurred simultaneously with the announcement of the unrestricted U-boat war.”

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unrestricted U-boat warfare. It had been decided that in case the Chancellor would not cooperate, a change of chancellors would be undertaken. On the 9th of January, in Pless, the final determination was formally taken to begin the unrestricted U-boat warfare on the 1st of February.

All those who took part saw perfectly clearly that the result of this determination would be war with the United States. "It must be. We are counting on the possibility of war with America and have made all preparations to meet it," are the words of Hindenburg, and he adds: "We are prepared to meet all emergencies." From his point of view, the chief factor to be observed was that the unconditional U-boat warfare should not constitute an operation which "weakens us at any other spot," speaking from the military standpoint.⁴² The Chancellor offered no opposition to the resolution reached. Not another word was spent in discussing Wilson's peace move or the fact that it was still in contemplation.

VI. The Result

For all practical purposes, Wilson's peace move was destroyed by the adoption of the resolution of January 9, 1917, with regard to the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat warfare. Although the wish had heretofore been entertained to reach peace through a peace move on the part of Wilson, from now on the casus belli with America was furnished. This interpretation is voiced by the Emperor's assertion reported on the 16th of January, 1917, that he placed no reliance upon Wilson's peace move, and that in case the break with America was unavoidable, "matters can not be changed; we shall go ahead."⁴³

Under these conditions, it was practically impossible that any attempt could be made to meet the further step which Wilson in his message to the Senate of the 22d of January once more undertook in connection with the peace question.⁴⁴ For this newest attempt for peace on the part of Wilson was also substantially made impossible by the draft of the note of the 31st of January.⁴⁵

Helfferrich, in particular, has asserted in the course of the hearings that the reasons which led to this action with regard to Wilson's message to the Senate must be found in the waning confidence in Wilson's honorable intention to bring about peace and in the contents of the message itself which, he says, were utterly unacceptable to Germany.

As regards Wilson's peace intentions and our confidence in him, his attitude at the Peace Conference of Versailles can give no final answer in so far as rendering a judgment with regard to his policy during the peace move is concerned. At that time, neither side had fought the war out to a decisive victory. The Entente, too, had ample cause for not placing itself in a position antagonistic to Wilson; the war spirit had not yet seized upon the American people, and the ambition to bring about a just peace founded on the spirit of reconciliation between nations was still a strong and mighty element in the United States. That Wilson himself was ridden by the fear that, if the conflict should continue, America might be drawn into the war against Germany, appears not only from the words which he addressed to the American Senate after the conclusion of peace, but was also

⁴²212, 213, Supplements, pt. VII, post, pp. 1317, 1320.

⁴³129, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1106.

⁴⁴61, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1021.

⁴⁵66, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1043.

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suggested in Bernstorff's dispatch of December 21, 1916.⁴⁶ But it is precisely this apprehension of Wilson's which is not an argument against, but for, his intention to bring about peace. For it results therefrom, and this is perfectly obvious, that Wilson did not feel himself swayed by common considerations of humanity alone to attempt to oppose the continuation of the war by means of a peace move, but from purely American interests as well. These were the interests which must have presented to his constant consideration the thought as to how he could spare the American people from participation in the war.

In any event, it is a settled fact that the German Imperial Government most earnestly desired Wilson as a peace negotiator and encouraged him to undertake such a peace move; it is furthermore a settled fact that, in spite of all the arguments which Helfferich marshals against the purity of Wilson's motives with regard to peace, the Imperial Government even on the 29th of January⁴⁷ officially declared itself ready to accept Wilson's mediation for the purpose of bringing about a direct conference between the belligerents, which had been confidentially submitted to the government on the 26th of January, and this contemporaneously with a confidential report of its own peace conditions.⁴⁸ Helfferich believes that an outspoken and anti-German attitude is to be detected in the contents of the message to the Senate; that Wilson is to be taken as having adopted the cause of the Entente without qualification. Nothing is to be gained by engaging in an argument as to whether Wilson, in the message, actually referred to the conditions which were submitted by the Entente in their answer to him as conditions capable of discussion, or only as a debating point for the demands of the Entente as well as for the demands of Germany, for the disclosure of which he continued repeatedly to call.

*In support of the latter interpretation, we may call attention to the facts referred to by Bernstorff in the course of his hearing, viz., that Lansing had brought to his attention the fact that Germany should not be altogether too moderate in her demands.*⁴⁹ Wilson, therefore, was taking into consideration the likelihood of renewed demands on the part of both sides, and it must be admitted that in material points the message is directed very plainly against the interests of the Entente. The Entente had announced that Germany must be conquered, but the President stated the principle that a peace must be concluded without the existence of conqueror or conquered. The note of the Entente had denied that the German Empire was entitled to equal privileges in connection with negotiations concerning peace. Wilson announced that only a peace entered into between equals was capable of duration. In November, 1916, the German Chancellor had submitted an answer of an acquiescent nature in the main to a speech of Sir Edward Grey, in which the establishment of an international court and the disarmament of land forces had been demanded, but had added that he must broaden the plan in contemplation to the extent of demanding a similar disarmament of sea forces and the freedom of the seas. Wilson accepted both demands of the Chancellor. It follows that, as a matter of fact, not only were fundamental contentions of the Entente rejected in the message to the Senate, but fundamental demands on the part of Germany accepted.

⁴⁶45, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1004.

⁴⁷72, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1048.

⁴⁸68, 69, 73, Supplements, pt. I, post, pp. 1046, 1047, 1050.

⁴⁹Stenographic Minutes, 2d sess., post, p. 271.

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In his testimony, Helfferich did not enter into an analysis of these incidental points, important though they were. He limited himself to taking as the starting-point for a basis of his interpretation Wilson's stand on the question of an independent Poland. In the process he has segregated the question from the connected whole of the negotiations with Wilson.

From these transactions, taken as a whole, it is apparent that, according to communications had with Colonel House, it was not Wilson's intention to meddle with territorial questions.⁵⁰ We must also bear in mind that, although Wilson undoubtedly did place the Polish question decidedly in the foreground, he was prevailed upon so to do by historical precedents in the premises, for Germany in the November proclamation had been the first to suggest, with all possible formalities, the independence of Poland, and it is not at all impossible that it was for this very reason that Wilson took the stand that he did on the Polish question. The discussion was in all probability directed against both Germany and Russia. *It can not be concluded from the words of the message that it was Wilson's actual intention that the German Empire should be physically deprived of portions of its territory. Bernstorff opposes this view, basing his opinion on his interviews with House. Gerard in his memoirs reaches the same conclusion.*⁵¹

*In any event, he appears to have been interested to a most acute degree by the questions as to how foreign national communities belonging to a numerical minority can be protected by international agreements, and how countries which have no outlet to the sea can obtain it through international agreement.*⁵² Be that as it may, Wilson certainly had at that time no definite program with regard to the Polish question, and it would not have been an altogether over-difficult task to clarify this question which at that time was still an apparently open one, by agreeing in the main with Wilson's message and at the same time supporting the German standpoint in no uncertain terms. The important communication of Bernstorff of the 27th of January supports this view.⁵³ According to this, Wilson, on the 26th of January, before the answer to his message to the Senate had been dispatched, formally, earnestly, and in confidence, renewed his peace offer on the basis of the message and indeed without any interposition in the matter of the nationally domestic peace conditions.

This communication of the 27th of January must be taken as one of the most important incidents of Wilson's peace move, as is clear to anybody who reads the text thereof. When it was received, a certain number of U-boats had already left port under instructions to commence the unrestricted U-boat warfare. The Chancellor was informed that it was not technically possible to call them back into port. In the light of subsequently proved facts, some doubt may be entertained as to whether this information was really correct. It is of no further significance. In the light of all that occurred,

⁵⁰69, 73, Supplements, pt. I, post, pp. 1047, 1050.

⁵¹According to the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer: "But that Wilson's expressions point unmistakably to the fact that he desired to sever a part of the German territory from the physical limits of the Empire, can by no means be inferred from the wording of the message."

⁵²Inserted by the committee in the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer.

⁵³69, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1047.

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it must be presumed to be out of the question that even if the recall of the boats had been mechanically possible, the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat warfare would not have come to pass. It was absolutely determined upon, and nowhere was there any visible agency which would have had the power to recall it. Germany had definitely discarded her formerly adopted policy based upon a peace move on the part of Wilson. When in the autumn of 1918 she again turned to Wilson, America with her inexhaustible resources in men and material which she placed and could place at the disposal of the enemy without stint, had turned the tide of war against us. A plea for the guarantee of an armistice had taken the place of the attempt to set in motion, hand and hand with Wilson, a peace move which could lead to a peace of understanding. Instead of the peace without conqueror or conquered appeared the peace of Versailles.

VII. Concluding Remarks

The question is submitted to the investigating committee as to what opportunities existed for peace parleys with the enemy, and if such opportunities did actually exist, why they were brought to naught. The question will be answered here with special reference to Wilson's peace move. Before we proceed to individual replies to these two questions, it is proper to remark that the point from which today it is possible to approach the vital occurrences of that critical period is a broader one than that which was afforded at the time of those episodes themselves. Judgment can be rendered today under conditions of simplicity and clearness which were not available for those participating in the deeds of that prior time. Today we may stand and look back upon the whole course of events, and we see effects and counter-effects which naturally were not susceptible to the gaze of those who took part in those events. Thus it happens that the "war machine," concerning which Bethmann-Hollweg has spoken (and correctly), is no longer in operation today, although the passions of those earlier political struggles still leave a tremor behind them. This "war machine" created an atmosphere which subjected decisions to a certain given pressure which today no longer exists.

And for that reason it is necessary, when we apply the standard by which judgments of past events are measured at the present time, to bear in mind the circumstances under which these great events passed into history. It will then be made clear that it can not become with us a question of a moral judgment, but merely a question of rendering a judgment as to how, at the present time, taking as a basis the knowledge that we have today, the decisions which were reached shall receive their political appraisalment.⁵⁴

A. The Question of the Possibilities of Peace

When we speak of possibilities of peace, it is clear that reference is made only to such possibilities as can be considered as such from the fact that they might have been able to lead to peace negotiations. Such possibilities can only then be considered as having existed if basic starting points are found upon which to base a foundation for such possibilities. In this sense the question of whether or not at the critical period the possibilities of peace existed, must be answered in the affirmative. Facts are at hand which show the existence of such a possibility, to wit:

1. It was supposed, during the course of negotiations concerning a peace move on the part of Wilson, that he would undertake a move in the direction of peace only if the

⁵⁴Stenographic Minutes, 4th sess., post, p. 350.

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situation were such as to justify the conclusion that it would not be rejected by the Entente.⁵⁵ One basic point of departure which can serve as a foundation for the idea that the peace move undertaken by Wilson was not from its inception purposeless, but that it could lead to conversations dealing with peace questions with the Entente, consists therefore in the fact of the peace move itself. This idea gains strength through the insistence and pertinacity of Wilson's endeavors on behalf of peace from December, 1916, until the end of January, 1917. At that time also, as Bernstorff reports on the 27th of January, 1917, he emphatically informed the Ambassador through Colonel House that he was convinced that if Germany acquiesced in his aim, he could bring about both peace conferences, that "he hoped with reason to be able to bring about peace conferences, and, indeed, at such an early date that unnecessary bloodshed in the spring offensive could be avoided."⁵⁶

2. On the 17th of December, 1916, the Pope officially communicated the fact that "he had good ground to believe that the Entente was inclined to peace negotiations if we would disclose something concerning our peace conditions; that the Entente was particularly interested in a guarantee for the restoration and complete independence of Belgium."⁵⁷ This official communication of the Pope is noted above under IV.

3. As a matter of fact, we know today that at that time the Entente, particularly from a financial standpoint, according to the disclosures of the English political economist Keynes, was in an extraordinarily critical condition, and that, objectively speaking, there were at that time, as a matter of fact, only two possibilities of which the Entente could avail itself in this position: Either to draw America into the war, even at the cost of an unrestricted U-boat warfare which at the time constituted a very welcome instrument in its behalf, or, on its side also, to give very serious thought to a peace of understanding.

*4. It is established beyond any question of doubt that at that time a strong financial pressure was exerted by the United States upon the Entente Powers not to withdraw from the possibility of peace negotiations. The Federal Reserve Board, by its warning, following hard upon an understanding unquestionably had with Wilson, stopped the further purchase by American banks of British securities. This step constituted the severest kind of a menace for the financing of the English conduct of the war. For England could not, like Germany, meet its shortage in foodstuffs and munitions with the products of a domestic market, but was in the most unlimited sense dependent upon the foreign and particularly the North American market, where it could only pay in dollars. From the moment when the American credit no longer existed, England could not hope to get sufficient food material or war material from the United States.*⁵⁸

⁵⁵Compare with above under III, ante, p. 130.

⁵⁶69, Supplements, pt. I, post, p. 1047.

⁵⁷99, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1079.

⁵⁸Inserted in the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer by the committee.

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In the face of these four points, no decisive weight can be attributed to the note with which the Entente answered our peace proposal. *It would not be a far-fetched assumption that the Entente note was specially prepared to bring about in Germany the resolve to commence unrestricted U-boat warfare in order thereby to bring to naught Wilson's peace move and to bring America definitely over to the side of the Entente.*⁵⁹ It is easily understood that the form and contents of the note under the conditions which existed at that time, were bound to have an irritating effect upon the feeling of the German people. If today we were again to analyze its contents with a quiet mind and in connection with all prior happenings and occurrences, we would not necessarily reject the view expressed by the Emperor Karl and by Czernin, according to which the note was impertinent in tone, but would see that it did not necessarily preclude the possibility of a continuance along the line of peace. However that may be, it is quite possible that there had never existed so favorable an opportunity for Germany to win not only the accord of the world but of the hostile States on the question of peace, as existed precisely at the moment in which the tone and contents of the Entente note appeared again to consign the thought of peace to oblivion. The excessive demands of the Entente note had had an unfavorable effect among the neutral Powers. If Germany had seized this moment for coming forward with moderate war aims and with a peace aim which the world could justify for Germany, together with an absolutely unambiguous declaration concerning the unconditional return and restoration of Belgium in the sense of the declaration of the Chancellor in the Reichstag on August 4, 1914, admitting that Belgium had suffered injury and that it must receive full compensation therefor, then, viewed from any standpoint, would the desire for peace, even in the case of hostile nations, have been strengthened in such a way as to bring a result hand in hand with a persistent and consistent carrying out of the German policy along this principle; in a word, a result which would not necessarily have constituted a diminution of Germany's territory, but at the same time, things being what they were at that period, could never have been such as to constitute in form what would have amounted to a sacrifice on the part of the Entente.

The communication of peace conditions made in this spirit would have provided the means in such a situation to awaken or to strengthen the willingness to negotiate which had either not yet come into existence or was as yet still the object of contention. It is no mere chance that Wilson, who had been approached by Germany as peace negotiator, as well as the Pope, with whom later in the year 1917 the basic principles of a peace move were discussed, made the attempt in the same way and at the same time to prevail upon Germany to make her peace conditions known. By a lucky combination, the way to carry such a step out had been opened to Germany. Her own peace proposal had been announced.

The world⁶⁰ was making inquiries concerning the conditions of peace of Germany, particularly with regard to a declaration regarding Belgium. At this stage came Wilson's attempt to have all the Powers communicate their conditions of peace. From this time on, the opportunity to have her own peace move brought to the highest pitch of efficiency was not taken advantage of by Germany.

It could not be taken advantage of because the conditions of peace which lay at the foundation of our peace offer and which have become known to us through the documents which have been

⁵⁹113, 116, Supplements, pt. III, post, pp. 1090, 1091.

⁶⁰According to the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer there appeared here: "was struck by this peace proposal in its peace sentiment and."

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published were such that they, like the peace conditions of the Entente, could only be carried out after a complete overthrow of the enemy. In particular it is to be observed that no reference was made to a free restitution of Belgium in the sense of the earlier declaration of the Chancellor. On the contrary, certain definite guarantees were claimed on behalf of Germany, and in the absence of the fulfilment of these guarantees an annexation of Liège with corresponding strips of territory was demanded.⁶¹ It is true that Bethmann-Hollweg considered these peace conditions as constituting the maximum which would be demanded and which would be subject to change in the proposed peace negotiations. But with regard to the nature of the peace conditions, taken as a whole, there was in no sense unanimity. Hindenburg opposed the standpoint of the Chancellor and demanded an exact statement of the minimum territorial demands upon which Bethmann-Hollweg must insist, in view of the then existing war situation, and under all circumstances, even at the price of the possibility of the continuance of the war.⁶² And what the Emperor thought about it all is to be deduced from the telegram of Counselor of Legation v. Grünau to the Foreign Office on the 2d of January, 1917, according to which the Emperor stated, after being informed of the note of rejection of the Entente, that he, on his part also, was obliged to modify our war aims; there could be no further question of any concessions to France and Belgium; King Albert was not to be allowed to return to Belgium; the coast of Flanders must come under our dominion.⁶³

With this set-back, any attempt to take further advantage of any supposed possibility of peace was out of the question.

B. The Inquiry as to Causes

If we seek to inquire into the causes of Germany's failure to take advantage of the situation brought about by the Wilson move, in order to reach a peace of understanding, the only answer that can be given, based on the material made available by official documents and hearings, is that the desire to end the war through a victory brought about by an unrestricted U-boat war eliminated the possibility of peace so far as Germany was concerned.

This desire made it impossible to bring about an intimate connection between the individual peace move and Wilson's peace note of the 21st of December, 1916, through continuing along the line marked out by the individual peace measure in a concrete and definite way. This desire was the element which put into execution the order to commence the unrestricted U-boat warfare, which made any further steps along the path of peace perfectly useless at this time. And this desire made it impossible for the formal acceptance of Wilson's peace mediation of the 27th of January, 1917, to have any timely effect.

The fundamental cause of this intention was the belief in the absolutely certain and quick success of the U-boat warfare. This intention obtained its strongest impetus *from the heartfelt wish of a people engaged in a most desperate conflict to end the war by an early victory, and from the view which, in particular, was consistently announced by the Supreme High Command that the enemy*

⁶¹78–85, Supplements, pt. II, post, pp. 1059–1068.

⁶²118, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1095.

⁶³115, Supplements, pt. III, post, p. 1091.

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likewise was opposed to a peace of understanding. It was the duty of those who were conducting the Empire's affairs and of those who counseled them to determine exactly whether or not the adoption of the unrestricted use of the U-boat weapon was really the suitable means for bringing about this victory. The political branch, and particularly Helfferich, whose duty it was to pass upon the commercial side of the question, were of the opinion that this question was to be answered in the negative. The argument in support of the memorial of the Chief of the Admiralty Staff of the Navy on December 22, 1916, and the position taken in agreement therewith by the Supreme High Command, were victorious on this point.⁶⁴ The result which was prophesied in the course of these arguments "that in case ruthless U-boat warfare is carried on, England will be forced to sue for peace within five months"⁶⁵ and even, as the Navy in particular asserted, by August, 1917, at the latest, did not follow, severe though the losses inflicted upon the enemy by the U-boat war were.⁶⁶ The mistake was based upon erroneous estimates. The following points are material in this connection:

1. The assumptions, from the commercial aspect, of a successful U-boat warfare were erroneously entertained, and especially was the commercial assistance on the part of America underestimated.
2. The terrifying effect upon neutral shipping did not reach the extent that it had been assumed would be reached.
3. Sufficient weight was not given to the effect of measures of a military and technical kind which were taken against the carrying on of an unrestricted U-boat warfare.
4. The military resources of the United States as an ally were fundamentally underestimated.
5. The military participation of America in the war in the shape of extensive troop transportation was hardly taken into consideration on account of the belief that the U-boats would be able to stop these transports even if transportation were attempted.
6. The question as to how far the military and commercial equipment of Germany would continue to be sufficient was limited to a consideration of the immediate future, but was not examined from the standpoint that peace might not have been obtained in the summer of 1917, and that, through the entrance of the United States into the war, it could be dragged out for a considerable length of time, and the issues thereof become more acute.

All these errors of judgment must be designated as mistakes of the most fatal kind. The effect of these errors is felt all the more heavily because the preparation of the opinion above referred to was not entered into with the care which was necessarily imposed by the tremendous importance of the question; nor was the proper preparation made to instruct public opinion along these lines with the necessary definiteness. The work of scientific authorities of the first order would have

⁶⁴Inserted by the committee in the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer.

⁶⁵Supplements, pt. V, p. 1214.

⁶⁶190, Supplements, pt. V, post, p. 1216.

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been required to satisfy the purposes of a fully comprehensive opinion, as well as the statements of experts of the very highest type. As a matter of fact, the opinion was made up and worked out by a Heidelberg professor who, by no means, could be considered as an authority of particularly high standing with regard to any question of world commerce or politics, together with several unknown cooperators of inconsiderable reputation. The experts who were heard are mentioned in the report itself. In no event were they leading authorities in the matters of commercial or political relations which were in question. Experts in matters which were of a peculiarly material nature, such, for instance, as the shipping trade, were not called upon to testify at all. The individuals who were heard were for the most part recognized champions of the policy of unrestricted U-boat warfare. It is to be regretted that steps were not taken which would have made it impossible for this memorial, with its scientific make-up, to have thrust itself into the public view and to constitute even for the purposes of parliamentary debate the only source of information available. No care was taken to see to it that the opinions which expressed an opposite view were likewise and at the same time brought to the knowledge of the Reichstag.

In particular, attention may be called to the fact that the important reports of Albert and Haniel⁶⁷ which, on account of the intimate knowledge possessed by their authors of American relations, contained the most detailed and earnest warning against the inception of the U-boat warfare, were not known outside of a small governmental circle. *It was, further, not known that Major v. Papen, the military attaché in the United States of America—as he has stated in his testimony of the 16th of April, 1920—addressed in the capacity of military expert the following words of warning against the commencement of an unrestricted U-boat warfare to the then Chief of the General Staff, General v. Falkenhayn: “If you do not succeed in keeping the United States from joining the coalition of our enemies, you will lose the war; on this point there can be absolutely no doubt.”*⁶⁸ *On the contrary, the head of the Department of Information of the Supreme High Command, Major Nicolai, prevented Major v. Papen from making an explanatory statement to the press with regard to the erroneous estimate regarding the amount of material resources of the United States, in accordance with the desire of the then Secretary of State v. Jagow.*⁶⁹

It was possible for the belief in the unquestioned success of the unrestricted U-boat warfare to become current because the political branch refrained from exercising further opposition against it. This occurred in the critical period. Bethmann makes particular reference to the extraordinary difficulties of such an opposition. But it is not clear that on account of these difficulties the opposition in question had to be or should have been given up. Bethmann and Helfferich called particular attention to the attitude of the Reichstag.

As a matter of fact, no majority existed at the critical period in favor of the peace of understanding, and *on the 7th of October, 1916, a resolution was passed according to the terms of which the Imperial Chancellor was to base his attitude with regard to the U-boat question on the conclusion reached by the Supreme High Command. By this means the decision was, as a practical proposition, placed in the hands of the military authorities, inasmuch as the resolution further*

⁶⁷172, 173, Supplements, pt. IV, post, pp. 1183, 1186.

⁶⁸211, Supplements, pt. VI, post, p. 1307.

⁶⁹Inserted by the committee in the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer.

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*declares that in case the decision to be rendered should be in favor of the unrestricted U-boat warfare, the Imperial Chancellor might be perfectly sure that the Reichstag would agree with this conclusion.*⁷⁰⁷¹ Nothing more is to be added to the severe words of the two statesmen with regard to this attitude of the then majority of the Reichstag.

At the same time, in passing judgment on these events, it must be borne in mind that the Reichstag had not been informed with regard to the true situation to such an extent or in such measure as was necessary, if we are going to hold the decisions of the Reichstag responsible for our national policy. The Reichstag had no knowledge about the military situation of our land forces, as, according to III, it was represented in the opinions of the military authorities at that time.⁷² It had no knowledge of the momentous reports which had been filed with the authorities with regard to the resources of the United States and the prospects of an unrestricted U-boat warfare. And before all, the Reichstag was absolutely without any knowledge that we had incited the Wilson peace move, and it was ignorant of the reasons which had led up thereto. This raises the question as to whether or not, even in the winter of 1916 and 1917, a majority in favor of a peace of understanding would have been found in the Reichstag if Bethmann-Hollweg and Helfferich in the Reichstag had refused to accept the responsibility for further directing the governmental policy and had submitted the question to the Reichstag either to resolve to support Bethmann-Hollweg along the path leading to a peace of understanding or to oppose him and take the road which led to war with the United States.

So far as can be ascertained, the political branch offered no opposition when the fatal decision was made after submission of the question to the Supreme High Command with regard to the commencing of unrestricted U-boat warfare. At this juncture, there was both inducement and opportunity to fight the point. The fight was not taken up. It is probable that Bethmann considered that it would be useless from the very start. The underlying reason as to why no opposition was offered is probably, however, a deeper one. When we think of the way in which the peace conditions which were really to be at the bottom of the peace proposal were drawn up, and particularly when we realize that the political branch made no earnest endeavors to leave the Belgian question outside of the discussion, so far as can be ascertained by documentary evidence and from the hearings, we find ourselves obliged to admit that the political branch does not appear to have been actuated by a real desire to set up an opposition which should have been maintained to the last. The inner consciousness of a definite political object constantly borne in mind and not to be lost to view during the varying fortunes of war, which measured up to the standard of Germany's strength and could stand as her justification, did not exist.

The political leadership was not only hemmed in between the juxtaposition of certain existing necessities through the dualism created by the military attitude and political insight—not only was

⁷⁰In the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer there appeared at this point the following: “A resolution had been adopted whereby to all intents and purposes the decision as to the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat warfare had been handed over to the military authorities.”

⁷¹Inserted by the committee in the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer.

⁷²Ante, pp. 130 et seq.—Editor.

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a supreme authority lacking which by a determined unity of purpose and a steadily consistent course on the part of the State could and would overcome this dualism; but the political leadership was above all not secure, *not at one with itself* and not ready to render a final decision. *The historical guilt of the political branch lies in this, that in the greatest and the most fateful question which has come upon Germany, its representatives allowed that which they were assured was injurious for the country to occur. At the same time, the Supreme High Command and the Admiralty Staff, both of whom continuously urged the commencement of an unrestricted U-boat warfare, can not escape blame. With full knowledge of Wilson's peace move which was still a possibility, and in the certain consciousness that the commencement of an unrestricted U-boat warfare would inevitably be followed by war with America, they "played their hand," concerning which Helfferich said: "If it is not trumps, Germany is lost for centuries."*⁷³

VIII. Conclusion

Herewith we present the conclusion, briefly stated as follows:

1. In the general situation which was brought about by the peace move of Wilson in the winter of 1916–17, certain conditions existed which made it possible to reach the point of peace parleys. The Imperial Government did not avail itself of these possibilities.
2. The reasons why the above-named opportunities were not taken advantage of are to be found in the resolution regarding the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat warfare of January 9, 1917.⁷⁴

Sinzheimer, Reporter

Gothein

Antonie Pfülf

Schücking

Dr. Oscar Cohn

Maxen

Schultz-Bromberg⁷⁵

Berlin, June 18, 1920.

⁷³Inserted by the committee in the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer.

⁷⁴In the draft of Recording Secretary Delegate Dr. Sinzheimer, there follows at this point: "and in the events leading up to it."

⁷⁵With the following reservation: I protest against the certification of the report made by the majority of the investigating committee, since it does not represent the facts objectively nor does it limit itself to the reproduction of facts, but confuses a one-sided and arbitrarily grouped selection of facts with individual judgments. I reserve the right, after the completed report and the opinions of the experts, which to-day are not yet available, have been entered, to submit a minority report to the records of the Commission.

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Minority Report

of Delegate Schultz-Bromberg with Regard to Wilson's Peace Move of 1916–1917

On the occasion of the session of the subcommittee of the 18th instant, I handed in the following statement in the nature of a protocol directed against the report completed by the majority of the Second Subcommittee of the parliamentary Committee of Inquiry with regard to the facts relative to its investigations in the matter of Wilson's peace move and the opening of the unrestricted U-boat warfare: I protest against the certification of the report made by the majority of the investigating committee, since it does not represent the facts objectively nor does it limit itself to the reproduction of facts, but confuses a one-sided and arbitrarily grouped selection of facts with individual judgments. I reserve the right, after the completed report and the opinions of the experts, which today are not yet available, have been entered, to submit a minority report to the records of the commission.

In view of the time which remains at my disposal for the purpose of submitting the present separate report, I am obliged to limit myself to calling particular attention only to the most important points with regard to which it appears to me to be proper either to supplement the majority report or to submit a differing opinion.

In the first place, I hold that it is my duty to protest against the methods as a whole used in the construction of the majority report. The requirements applicable to the report of a parliamentary investigating committee demand, first of all, an ordered arrangement of the actual results of the investigation; it must be made perfectly plain as to what facts have been determined beyond any question and what facts still remain matters of doubt. It is the province of such a report to hold itself free from purely personal conclusions. To the extent that conclusions are drawn and judgments rendered on the basis of the facts submitted, they must be made to appear as such, in sharp contrast to the establishment of the facts themselves, and they are to be brought about in such a way as to make it perfectly plain that the question at issue is not the establishment of facts, but the drawing of conclusions and the rendering of opinions. The majority report pays no attention to these elementary principles. The facts which have been established through the investigating committee are almost without exception taken into consideration to the extent only to which they fit in with the conclusions and judgments of the majority of the committee, which for the most part were fixed before the investigation by the committee. The establishment of facts is confused with conclusions of judgment to support which no substantial evidence has been submitted, and, I may add, which in part at least have not even been made the object of interrogation for the purpose of taking evidence. Finally, conclusions and judgments of a most subjective kind have been continually interwoven in the actual representations made by the report, without its being made apparent in a manner sufficiently clear that the question involved is one of subjective conclusions and judgments. The task of the investigating committee to bring about an unbiased clarification of past events can not be fulfilled when the methods adopted here are used. With regard to the subject matter itself, I have to make the following statements by way of supplementing and correcting the majority report.

[...]

VI. The Opening of the Unrestricted U-boat Warfare

The majority report gives a picture of the attitude of the political branch of the government with regard to the U-boat warfare which must create the impression that the political branch looked upon the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat warfare as fundamentally and with no

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qualification whatsoever, destined to failure. It is perfectly true that, in very emphatic fashion and upon numerous occasions the political branch of the government pointed to the tremendous risks of the U-boat warfare and that the political branch, after the reports made by their representatives, had concluded, and this only with a heavy heart after the complete failure of efforts for peace, which failure had been regarded in January, 1917, as permanent in nature, that the use of this instrumentality of warfare was no longer to be successfully opposed. On the other hand, no proof has been submitted to show that the political branch had looked upon the U-boat warfare as being so devoid of possible success as to justify its complete rejection, even taking into consideration the situation which had come about through the failure of the peace moves, and in the face of the compelling military reasons announced by the Supreme High Command for having recourse to this instrument of war.

It is true that the majority report states that "in the words of Helfferich, reasserted later by Admiral v. Holtzendorff," the U-boat warfare would lead to ruin; but Helfferich was positively not asked when and where and under what circumstances he made the statement. Likewise does the majority report refer to the phrase which was actually used by Helfferich at the conferences of the main Committee of October, 1916, that if the unrestricted U-boat warfare did not constitute a card which, when played, was trumps, then Germany would be lost for centuries.

But if the majority report desires, on the strength of this phrase, to base an argument to the effect that according to Helfferich's view the U-boat warfare *must* necessarily and under all conditions lead to ruin, this would be in flat conflict with assertions made by Helfferich in the same speech, namely, that the technical situation for carrying out successfully an unrestricted U-boat warfare had noticeably improved and would, as far as could be seen, continue to improve in the future, particularly in view of the poor harvest which had been gathered in the countries of our enemies and in those regions which were providing them with sustenance. To be weighed in the balance against the great risk *was the prospect of success* in combination with the equally great risk of our continuation of the war *without the employment of this fatal instrumentality of warfare* forced upon us against our will, after the efforts to obtain peace had failed.

The majority report makes, here again, no reference to the extent to which, as a matter of fact, the prospects of a successful result of the unrestricted U-boat warfare seemed to point, to the narrow margin by which we failed to achieve success as a result of unrestricted U-boat warfare, or to what internal events hampered most fatally the efficacy of the U-boat weapon. It makes no reference, either, to the statements of the American Admiral Sims, which were made the subject of comment in the course of the proceedings before the investigation committee, with regard to his conversation with the British Admiral Jellicoe, from which may be ascertained to what extraordinary extent the U-boat warfare really was efficient, and that the British Admiral seriously considered the possibility of the loss of the war by England. Nor does it make any reference to Bethmann-Hollweg's statement that:

The entrance of America into the war finally resulted in our ruin; and yet in the course of your investigations you will constantly come into contact with *facts* which indicate that *even after the entrance of America into the war it did not inevitably follow that necessarily this should spell disaster for us. Even during my tenure of office, toward the end of the first half of 1917, it appeared as if opportunities for negotiations were opening up.*

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The investigating committee discontinued the discussion of these later opportunities for peace in the course of the line of questioning which it next initiated, and postponed their consideration until a later time.

A conclusive judgment in regard to the peace move of Mr. Wilson and the opening of the unrestricted U-boat warfare and all questions concerning them can be rendered only when those later steps have been fully and effectively explained.

The majority report anticipates the final decision, in fact to the extent that on the one hand every point which speaks in favor of the policy of President Wilson is brought into prominence, and on the other hand everything is emphasized which can in any way serve to expose to criticism the policy followed by Germany. In a report such as this, it is not to be expected that a clarification of the causes of the misfortunes of our country can be materially advanced.

Finally, I most emphatically call attention to the fact that the taking of testimony which was ordered by the investigating committee was not even carried through to the extent that the majority of the committee itself considered necessary. Thus, the testimony of General Field Marshal v. Hindenburg and General v. Ludendorff was not carried to a conclusion, but, on the 18th of November, 1919, merely suspended according to the statements of the chairman of the committee on account of the fatigue of the witnesses. But no further examination of these two most important witnesses took place. The taking of testimony was not carried to a conclusion either with regard to these witnesses or with regard to other points. If the announcement of the judgment of the majority is to be regarded as permissible in the case of a parliamentary report of this kind, it can in any event only be considered on the assumption that complete examinations of witnesses have been made. These elementary principles, applicable to the very premises on which the rendering of a judgment depends, have been in this case grossly neglected. The taking of testimony which was commenced, but which was in no way terminated, was suddenly discontinued so that, for instance, not only was the completion of the testimony of Ludendorff and Hindenburg not accomplished, but one even went so far as to leave uncompleted the examination of Minister Helfferich, to whose statements the report makes constant reference, to the extent of failing to examine him with regard to the occasion and significance of the remarks made by him. If this had been done, it is quite certain that the meaning to be attributed to his statements would have been viewed in a light quite different from that on which the report seeks to base its arguments with regard thereto.

Even the most experienced judge can not render a correct judgment without a clear conception of the facts which are to form the basis of his judgment. The committee which was called upon to investigate one of the most difficult problems of the World War—the significance of the peace move of Wilson—failed to exhaust the possibilities of the most important sources of evidence which were placed at its disposal, quite aside from the fact that according to the unanimous opinion of the experts, in the absence of knowledge of the acts and projects of our enemies, an acceptable answer to the question submitted to the committee would seem to be impossible.

Accordingly, the report of the majority of the committee which, to the detriment of its own country, and looking at the matter from one side only, underscores and emphasizes all those facts which appear to be derogatory to the policy of Germany, does not deserve the name of an objective judgment. It consists of nothing more than an assertion based on mere party politics and parading in the guise of a parliamentary announcement of the guilt of Germany, to the effect that those of its agencies which governed at that time are responsible for the prolongation of the war; an assertion which uncontradicted testimony of foreign origin is not the last to challenge.

Schultz-Bromberg,
Member of the National Assembly.

Berlin, June 23, 1920.

Helfferrich

The World War, Volume II: From the outbreak of the war to unrestricted submarine warfare by Karl Helfferrich. Excerpt, machine translated from the original German. Full text available on Project Gutenberg and licensed under the Project Gutenberg terms.

Helfferrich (1872-1924) was a legal and financial expert who, during much of the period recounted here, was serving as Vice Chancellor of the German Empire and Secretary of State of the Interior; he had previously been Secretary of State of the Treasury. Bethmann elevated him as an ally; Helfferrich was an able bureaucratic fighter thanks to his ability to drown opponents in statistics and effective counterarguments. His postwar career included extensive agitation for the conservative monarchist right, especially against Centre Party's Matthias Erzberger, and work to stabilize the German currency. Helfferrich died in 1924.

You can learn more about Helfferrich and this decision, drawing on contemporary documents, in John G. Williamson's *Karl Helfferrich, 1872-1924: Economist, Financier, Politician* (1971), which is available on JSTOR.

Peace efforts and submarine warfare

General von Clausewitz's famous statement, "War is merely the continuation of politics by other means," does not imply that war replaces politics during a state of war. Clausewitz himself rejected the view that "war, from the moment it is called forth by politics, could replace it, displace it as something entirely independent of it, and follow only its own laws." He explicitly emphasized that, since war proceeds from a political purpose, this primary motive that called it into being must also remain the primary and highest consideration in its conduct, that politics will therefore permeate the entire act of war and exert a continuous influence on it, although he does add the qualification: "as far as the nature of the forces exploding in it permits." But politics must not only remain the highest consideration in the conduct of war, as is the case with the relationship between end and means, but it must also be free to use all other means at its disposal during a state of war, in addition to the extraordinary means of war, i.e. the use of military force. If these other non-warlike means are summarized under the name "diplomacy", this means: Diplomacy as a means of politics is only eliminated by the state of war to the extent that its practical application is made impossible by the state of war; moreover, even during a state of war, military and diplomatic actions exist side by side as means of politics. The task of the head of state - and a task that is usually only inadequately solved - is to ensure the unity and systematic interaction of the two types of means, to adapt the means to the end and, where necessary - for politics remains the art of the possible - to modify the end according to the possibilities offered by the means - what is briefly called the "unity of politics and warfare".

The war that broke out in the summer of 1914 was for us the continuation of the policy of defending our right to national existence and to the peaceful development of our people's strength against a coalition that had denied us this right even before the outbreak of war. We had sought to atrophy

the means of diplomatic encirclement in the face of a coalition that was far superior to us and our allies in terms of men and power. It was precisely the enemy's superior strength that compelled us to use every suitable means to achieve our war aim, both in the areas of actual warfare and in the area of diplomacy. At the same time, this compulsion to exert all resources to the utmost increased the danger that the unity of politics and warfare would be lost. If we had to wage war not only militarily but also diplomatically, if, in view of the danger of being crushed militarily and economically by the enemy's superior strength, we were compelled to use diplomatic means to open up possibilities for peace and to prevent any further threatening growth for the enemy coalition, this could lead to conflicts with the necessity of using all military means promising success.

This danger of conflict has become a reality in the question of submarine warfare.

Since that Tirpitz interview in December 1914, the hope of using our submarines to strike England, the soul and cohesion of the enemy coalition of powers, dead with our submarines and thereby bring the war to a good end in a short time, grew ever higher. But even the first attempts to use this weapon demonstrated its double-edged nature; they revealed the danger that its use could induce neutrals, especially the United States, to side with our enemies. This would not only limit the prospects of achieving peace without the almost unattainable complete defeat of our enemies, but would also strengthen the enemy coalition, which threatened to be our undoing.

Thus, from the end of 1914 onwards, the conflict between peace efforts and submarine warfare accompanied the tremendous struggle on the fronts and the self-sacrificing war effort at home; it led to the most serious conflicts between the men responsible for Germany's fate and stirred our people to its core.

The question of peace

Before the war, the prevailing opinion among our military and diplomats, our practitioners and economic scholars, was that a modern war could only be of short duration. In 1909, Field Marshal Count von Schlieffen stated that a protracted war was "impossible at a time when the existence of a nation is based on the uninterrupted progress of trade and industry, and a swift decision must set the stalled machinery in motion again. A strategy of attrition cannot be pursued when the maintenance of millions requires the expenditure of billions." The very first months of the World War refuted this theory. When the expected decision failed to materialize after the first massive clash between the armies in the West and East, the economies and finances of the belligerent countries did not collapse under the force of the war, but rather adjusted to the extraordinary circumstances of the war with astonishing adaptability. Just as modern weapons technology was incapable of bringing about a swift decision, neither we nor our opponents were faced with an economic or financial constraint severe enough to dictate a swift end to the war. The strategy of attrition and a war of exhaustion had become tangible options that all belligerent states had to take into account.

Only reluctantly and slowly did we get used to this idea. But when the major military actions of the spring of 1915 failed to bring about a decision, when Italy, a new great power, entered the field against the Central Powers, we finally had to accept the likelihood of a long war.

The prospect of a protracted war of attrition was anything but favorable for us. The longer the war lasted, the less our advantage of a better and more prepared military organization would become, the more strongly and effectively our enemies could bring their scattered and poorly organized superiority of men and power against us, and ultimately the more severe the disadvantage of economic constraint would weigh on us. Thus, when military decisions receded into the unknown, when we were forced into a defensive position in the field of economic warfare by our geographical position and the enemy's naval supremacy, when we were ultimately unable to employ the only means by which we could conceivably stifle the enemy's superior force, out of doubt about its decisive effectiveness and fears of its repercussions on neutrals, this created the greatest necessity for those who direct our political leadership to seek possibilities for peace.

Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg and, I believe, the Kaiser, too, grasped this situation early on. Since I, through my official position, came into closer contact with Mr. von Bethmann, I was able to observe how the one question: Where is the path to peace? occupied him constantly and most profoundly. His great concern was that we might only arrive at peace negotiations when our strength and resources were exhausted, and would then be forced to accept our opponents' conditions. The Chancellor first spoke to me in detail about this concern in April 1915, and he returned to it in every confidential discussion during the further course of the war. Neither our military successes, which he always viewed skeptically with regard to their decisive effect on the war, nor the surprising evidence of our economic and financial capacity were able to relieve the pressure on him. He therefore believed that we could not be responsible for allowing any possibility of peace to fail due to exaggerated war aims. For him, the war aim was the preservation of our territorial and economic possessions. If the overall situation at the time of entering into peace negotiations had allowed us to achieve additional security for the future and a strengthening of our economic position, Mr. von Bethmann would have seized this advantage. However, I am convinced that he would not have allowed peace to fail on any demand that went beyond the preservation of our pre-war possessions.

Based on this fundamental understanding, Herr von Bethmann ceaselessly sought out points of contact and where our enemies showed a willingness to talk of peace. He primarily examined the speeches and other statements of enemy statesmen to determine what willingness to negotiate could be discerned from the words and between the words. His own statements were designed to demonstrate to his opponents our readiness to negotiate. He accustomed to countering the enemy's aims of conquest and annihilation with our aim of defense and security. "A war of annihilation is still being waged against us," he said on December 9, 1915, in response to a Social Democratic peace interpellation, referring to war speeches delivered shortly before by Messrs. Asquith, Briand, and Sasonoff. "We must reckon with this. With theories, with statements of peace on our part, we will not make progress and will not reach a conclusion. If our enemies come to us with peace offers

that are in keeping with Germany's dignity and security, we are always ready to discuss them... For the German government, this struggle remains what it was from the beginning and what has been affirmed unchanged in all our rallies: the defensive war of the German people."

Any enemy statesman who had read these and similar statements by the Reich Chancellor with the same passionate effort to find a path to peace — as the speeches of enemy statesmen were scrutinized in Berlin — would have had to conclude, and surely did conclude: Germany is ready for a peace that satisfies its dignity and its security." The obstacle to peace negotiations, indeed to a German initiative for peace negotiations, lay exclusively in the declarations of the Entente statesmen, who set as their war aim the destruction of so-called "Prussian militarism," the destruction of German economic power, the separation of Alsace-Lorraine or even the entire left bank of the Rhine and our eastern marches, as well as similar desires for conquest and annexation of our allies.

Therefore, if no peace talks took place, this was not due—subsequent developments have clearly shown this—to the deafness of the Entente statesmen, but simply to the fact that the Entente statesmen insisted on their war aims, which were incompatible with the security, existence, and dignity of Germany. The leading statesmen of the Entente were firmly resolved to carry the war through to the defeat of Germany — to the 'knock-out blow' of Lloyd George — and they maintained, aside from temporary fluctuations, a firm confidence from beginning to end that they would succeed in achieving their goals of destruction and conquest. It was not because of the lack of peacemaking on the part of the German government or the German people, not because of a lack of clarity in defining our war aims, nor because of the failure of our diplomatic efforts to establish contact that negotiations for a "peace of mutual understanding" failed. All the soundings and contacts attempted outside of official government rallies—by heads of state and diplomats, by merchants and industrialists, by the socialist parties of the belligerent and neutral countries—also failed because of this.

The Chancellor faced a difficult situation regarding the peace issue. It is a long-standing experience that the military's demands in peace agreements usually go further than the political leaders can enforce and take responsibility for, and this was a recurring theme. In addition to the "border regulations" that our military leaders declared necessary, there were also the navy's demands for the security of the Flemish coast. But the struggle for war aims was not confined to the conference rooms of those in charge; it increasingly gripped and tore apart the entire nation.

The brilliant feats of arms of our armies and their leaders, the conquest and occupation of large parts of enemy territory in the West and East, strengthened the people and the army in their confident belief in a victorious outcome to the war. Large sections of the population were deluded by the fact that, despite all the great successes on the European theaters, the war for us was not only a defensive war by its very nature, but also, throughout its military, maritime, and economic development, a hard, fiercely contested, and uncertain war of defense. The tremendous achievements of the army and people, many thought and said, demanded a correspondingly great

prize of victory and, at the same time, allowed for such a prize of victory to be brought home, if only, according to the old Blücher saying, the pen did not spoil what the sword had won. In the attitude of the Chancellor, who refused to commit to the great war aims and who repeatedly made it clear that he was in favor of a peace limited to the purpose of a defensive war, these sections saw faintheartedness, a lack of will to win, and a weakening of the confidence of the German people that was dangerous for the outcome of the war. The severe attacks to which Mr. von Bethmann-Hollweg was subjected in this direction are still fresh in everyone's memory. From the other side, as the war dragged on, increasing pressure was placed on the Chancellor to clearly and publicly declare that Germany would be content with a peace without any territorial acquisitions or reparations. He was accused of contributing to the prolongation of the war by refusing such an explicit and binding declaration and of undermining the spirit of the people, who had marched to the front for defense, not for conquest.

In May 1917, Mr. von Bethmann himself described his position on this onslaught from two opposing directions as follows (Reichstag session of May 15, 1917):

"Even today, I see no willingness for peace from England and France, nor any abandonment of their excessive aims of conquest and economic destruction... Given the current state of our Western enemies, does anyone believe that they can bring them to peace through a program of renunciation and abdication? And that is what matters! Should I actually give these Western enemies an assurance that allows them to prolong the war indefinitely without any risk of loss to themselves?... Or should I unilaterally commit the German Reich in all directions to a formula that encompasses only a part of the totality of the peace conditions, that unilaterally abandons the successes our sons and brothers have won with their blood, and that leaves all other accounts pending? I reject such a policy.... And should I, conversely, establish a program of conquest? I reject that too. We did not go to this war to make conquests, and we are now fighting against almost the entire world, but solely to secure our existence." and to firmly establish the future of the nation. Just as a program of renunciation does not help to win victory and end the war, so does a program of conquest. On the contrary! I would merely be playing the game of the enemy rulers; I would make it easier for them to further seduce their war-weary peoples and prolong the war indefinitely."

The Chancellor could not satisfy either the right or the left with such statements. And yet, even today, I still believe that his position was the correct one, indeed the only possible one. Either our enemies were prepared to renounce their aims of conquest and annihilation, in which case the Chancellor's repeated statements about our fundamental willingness to be content with achieving our defense goal provided a sufficient basis for initiating peace negotiations. Or the enemies were—and this was the reality—unprepared to renounce their aims of conquest and annihilation, in which case even an announcement of all the details of our peace program could not lead to peace negotiations, but like any unilateral commitment, it would have only given the enemy the advantage of freedom of action with limited risk for every further development, while leaving us with the disadvantage of having our hands tied under unlimited risk.

But these were ultimately questions of tactics, about which one can argue and, unfortunately, there were many, very heated and very public arguments.

Regarding the matter itself, I believe I can say the following:

If at any point during the war the possibility had arisen of achieving a peace that would have left us, in broad terms, our pre-war territorial and economic possessions, peace would have existed; it would not have failed because of any compensation or border regulation we demanded, nor because of any German demands regarding Belgium, if our wishes in these directions could only have been achieved at the price of a continuation of the war. This is my conviction, even though the final word had not yet been spoken among the involved in the decision, and without precise knowledge of the situation at the moment of actual negotiations, it could not have been spoken at all. Anyone who has ever had to conduct major and important negotiations knows that the final decisions are made not before, but during, the negotiations, and usually at a time considerably closer to the end of the negotiations than to their beginning; that the final concessions were never made through persuasion in discussions about still impractical eventualities, but always only under the direct pressure of responsibility for the yes or no. I am certain that no chancellor, neither Bethmann nor Michaelis nor Hertling, immediately faced with the choice between a status quo peace or an unforeseeable continuation of the war, would have chosen anything other than peace; and I am equally certain that the Kaiser would have approved and upheld such a decision, even against the strongest opposition from other advisors and against a violent rebellion from strong political currents. For as little as the Kaiser wanted war, even if his demeanor occasionally gave a belligerent impression, the Kaiser suffered greatly from the war and desired peace for himself and for the German people.

The failure of all our efforts to achieve peace through mutual agreement inevitably had a strong impact on our conduct of the war, especially on the decisions regarding the hotly contested issue of submarine warfare. The more clearly our enemies' aversion to peace negotiations became apparent, the more weight we had to place on our demand that every available means of warfare be used to defeat the enemy, disregarding all other considerations.

The first phase of the submarine war

Early on September 22, 1914, U-9, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Weddigen, sank the three British cruisers, "Abukir," "Hogue," and "Cressy," within a single hour. The three torpedo shots reverberated throughout the world. In England, they aroused serious concern, even dismay. In Germany, they sparked exuberant hopes: people began to see the submarine as the weapon destined to crush British naval tyranny.

These hopes received a strong boost when, on December 21, 1914, Admiral von Tirpitz spoke to a representative of the American "United Press" about the possibility of submarine warfare against enemy merchant ships, which could strike England at its most vulnerable point—the supply of food and raw materials. Everyone agreed that the highest naval authority could only issue such a

public warning if the effectiveness of submarine warfare was assured and if the threat was backed up by action. England had already dispelled any reservations about international law in German public opinion by its illegal trade and hunger blockade, and especially by declaring the entire North Sea a war zone on November 3, 1914.

When I joined the Reich leadership on February 1, the declaration of submarine trade warfare was imminent. A proclamation had been prepared declaring the waters around Great Britain and Ireland a war zone; from February 18, 1915, any enemy merchant ship encountered in this war zone was to be destroyed. The proclamation added that it would not always be possible to avert the dangers posed to the crew and passengers; furthermore, neutral ships in the war zone were also at risk, since, given the misuse of neutral flags ordered by the British government on January 31 and the contingencies of naval warfare, it could not always be avoided that attacks intended for enemy ships also hit neutral ships.

In addition to the announcement, a supporting memorandum was prepared, which was delivered to the neutral and enemy powers on 4 February 1915. The memorandum first outlined in broad terms how England, in its naval warfare, was violating all international law in order to starve the German people by paralyzing even legitimate neutral trade. It then pointed out that the neutral powers had, by and large, submitted to the British government's illegal measures, that they had been content with theoretical protests and that they had appeared to accept the British invocation of its vital national interests as sufficient justification for any kind of warfare. Germany must now also invoke such vital interests and respond to the British declaration of a war zone by designating the waters surrounding Great Britain and Ireland as a theater of war and countering enemy shipping there with all available means of warfare. Furthermore, the memorandum warned neutrals, for the reasons already stated in the announcement, not to entrust crews, passengers, and goods to enemy ships sailing through the naval warfare zone, and it was urgently recommended that they also avoid entering the naval warfare zone for their own ships. "For even if the German naval forces have been instructed to refrain from acts of violence against neutral vessels, insofar as they are recognizable as such, it cannot always be prevented, in view of the misuse of neutral flags ordered by the British Government and the accidents of war, that they too may fall victim to an attack calculated against enemy vessels."

Final approval from the Kaiser and the Chancellor was still pending. For both, it was not an easy decision. The danger that this type of warfare could claim the lives of peaceful passengers — including women and children — and the prospect of complications with neutral powers, especially the United States, were clearly in their minds. It was a coincidence that two months earlier, I had been able to gain insight into the Kaiser's views. I was summoned to the imperial dinner in Charleville on the evening of November 25, 1914. The Kaiser brought the news that the sinking of the British superdreadnought "Audacious," which had struck a German mine, had been confirmed. At the table, a high-ranking naval officer—not Admiral von Tirpitz—remarked that the giant English passenger steamer "Oceanic" had also almost struck a mine. The Kaiser replied: "Thank God it didn't come to that!" At a somewhat astonished gesture from the Admiral, the

Emperor drew himself up and said in a loud voice: "Gentlemen, always remember: our sword must remain pure. We do not wage war against women and children. We want to wage war decently, no matter what the others do. Remember that!"

The Chancellor and the Kaiser were enabled to agree to the declaration of submarine warfare in the waters around England by the instruction that neutral ships in the naval war zone should be spared. It was clear that this would impair the effectiveness of submarine warfare; however, for reasons of humanity and to avoid serious conflicts with neutrals, this restriction was considered essential. It was later sometimes claimed that the Chancellor had subsequently ambushed the Navy with this restriction, thereby thwarting the Navy's anticipated effect of that first submarine war. This assumption is incorrect; as is clear from the text of the announcement and the memorandum of February 4, 1915, the order to the submarines to "refrain from acts of violence against neutral ships" had already been given when the new naval warfare was announced.

The Navy counted on a quick success. Although the number and capabilities of the available submarines were small, they hoped for a strong deterrent effect.

If shipping in the British Isles was significantly disrupted, this would have effectively struck at the very roots of England's vitality. For the British Isles were far more integrated into the global economy than Germany. Not only industry, but also the nation's food supply in the United Kingdom was far more dependent on abundant and uninterrupted overseas supplies than was the case in Germany. In its economic policy of recent decades, Germany had reconciled the promotion of its foreign trade with the preservation and development of its domestic primary production. In the total value of our foreign trade, we had come close to England; but at the same time we had increased our own production, especially of the most important food crops, in an even greater proportion than our population had increased.

England, on the other hand, relying on its naval supremacy, had increasingly relied on overseas imports for its economic life, especially its food supply, and allowed its agriculture to decline. In the years before the outbreak of war, England had to meet three-quarters to four-fifths of its bread grain needs, nearly two-thirds of its butter needs, and about two-fifths of its meat needs from overseas imports. Furthermore, its coal mining industry relied on large supplies of pit timber, and its iron and steel industry on large supplies of foreign, high-grade iron ore. Its large textile industry was dependent on foreign raw materials. Petroleum and petroleum products, such as gasoline, so vital for warfare, had to be imported by sea. The total imports of Great Britain in the last year of peace amounted to around 57 million tons. Of this, around 20 million tons, or a strong third, were foodstuffs and luxury goods, almost 16 million tons were timber, around 7.5 million tons were iron ore, and all other goods together amounted to around 13.5 million tons. A significant reduction in shipping traffic to the British Isles therefore had to be targeted at those categories that were indispensable for the people's supply and the conduct of the war and for which replacements could either not be obtained at all or only slowly and within narrow limits in their own country.

Coal predominated in exports in terms of quantity. Of the total export volume in 1913 of approximately 92 million tons, coal alone accounted for approximately 78 million tons, while all other goods accounted for only about 14 million. The economies and warfare of England's allies were doubly dependent on British coal since Germany occupied the Belgian and northern French coal basins.

All these factors made the submarine trade war appear to be an effective reprisal against the British trade and hunger war, always assuming that it would be possible to extensively and steadily reduce shipping traffic to and from the British Isles.

How the neutrals would react to this new form of naval warfare was uncertain, however. The order given to submarines not to attack neutral ships, even in the naval warfare zone, had shown consideration for neutral interests, the effect of which was expected to be that the neutrals would respond to our submarine trade war with the same degree of formal protests, such as those made to England regarding the violations of international law committed by the latter at the expense of neutral states, particularly the declaration of the North Sea as a war zone. Under-Secretary of State Zimmermann had sounded out Ambassador Gerard regarding the United States' attitude and had gained the impression that more than a paper protest was unlikely to be expected from the government in Washington.

The protests did indeed come.

The American objection, which Mr. Gerard presented on February 12, 1915, was, despite its outward courtesy, very definite and unambiguous in its substance. The American note rejected the criticism leveled in the German government's memorandum of February 4 regarding its allegedly non-neutral attitude. It stated that the German government had adopted a position toward all the encroachments of the other belligerent nations that entitled it "to hold these governments properly responsible for any possible effects on American shipping that are not justified by the established principles of international law." Regarding the measures announced by the German Admiralty, the note stated that the American government believed it had the right, indeed the duty, to request the German government to assess the potential harm to their mutual relations if any United States merchant vessel were destroyed or the death of an American citizen were caused. The American Government would be unable to regard such acts as anything other than an inexcusable violation of neutral rights and would be compelled to hold the German Government strictly responsible for such acts of its naval authorities and to take all steps necessary to protect American life and property and to secure the full enjoyment of American rights on the high seas for Americans. The American Government hoped that the German Government could and would give assurances that American citizens and their vessels would not be harassed in any manner, even in the naval theater, except by means of searches by German naval forces.

The American government thus already took the position in this note that it had fulfilled its neutrality by holding the government from which the violation originated "properly" responsible for the disadvantages suffered by the Americans as a result of violations of international law. It did

not allow Germany to criticize how this might have been done. In reality, it had so far limited itself to demanding compensation from England. However, it made no serious attempt to compel the British government to comply with the norms of international law. It announced to Germany that it would not only hold the German government responsible for any damage resulting from the implementation of the measures announced on February 4, but would also take "all steps" to protect American life and property and to ensure American freedom of travel on the seas.

With this, submarine warfare had already taken on a more serious aspect than anyone had expected when the declaration of February 4 was issued. For the further development of the war depended less on whether the attitude of the United States government was just and equitable than on what position it was determined to take in practice. And in this respect, the American note did not offer very good prospects.

The Reich government issued a detailed reply to the note on February 16. It first explained that the announced measure was in no way directed against the legitimate trade and shipping of the neutrals, but merely represented a counter-defence, enforced by Germany's vital interests, against England's illegal naval warfare. The neutrals had so far been unable to prevent the cessation of their trade with Germany, despite their protests. This created a situation in which, on the one hand, Germany, with the tacit or protesting tolerance of the neutral countries, was cut off from overseas imports, even of goods that were never war contraband, while, with the tolerance of the neutral governments, England was supplied with goods that were always and unequivocally considered contraband. Particular attention was drawn to the munitions and arms deliveries from the United States to the Entente. "The German Government," the note continued, "is well aware that the exercise of rights and the toleration of injustice on the part of neutrals is formally at their discretion and does not involve a formal breach of neutrality; consequently, it has not raised the accusation of a formal breach of neutrality. However, the German Government cannot - precisely in the interest of complete clarity in the relations between the two countries - refrain from emphasizing that it, along with the entire German public opinion, feels seriously disadvantaged by the fact that the neutrals have so far achieved no or only insignificant successes in safeguarding their rights to internationally legitimate trade with Germany, while they make unrestricted use of their right to tolerate the contraband trade with England and our other enemies. If it is the right of neutrals not to protect their legitimate trade with Germany, and even to allow themselves to be persuaded by England to consciously and deliberately restrict this trade, so it is, on the other hand, no less their good, but unfortunately not applied, right to stop the contraband trade, especially the arms trade, with Germany's enemies.[4] In this situation, the German government, after six months of patience and waiting, finds itself compelled to respond to England's murderous naval warfare with sharp countermeasures. If England, in its fight against Germany, appeals to hunger as an ally, with the intention of forcing a civilised people of 70 million to choose between miserable degradation or submission to its political and commercial will, the German government is today determined to take up the gauntlet and appeal to this same ally; it trusts that the neutrals, who have so far tacitly or acquiesced to the detrimental consequences of the English hunger war, will show no less

tolerance towards Germany, even if the German measures represent new forms of naval warfare, just as the English have done so far." The note then reiterated that the commanders of the German submarines were instructed to refrain from acts of violence against American merchant ships, insofar as they were recognizable as such, and, to avoid confusion, suggested that the American government should mark its ships carrying enemy cargo and touching on the British theater of war by means of convoys, the implementation of which the German government was prepared to negotiate immediately. The note concluded: "Should the American government, by virtue of the weight it is entitled and able to place in the scales of the destinies of nations, succeed at the last hour in removing the reasons that make its action an imperative duty for the German government, should the American government, in particular, find a way to ensure compliance with the London Declaration on the Law of War on the part of the powers at war with Germany, and thereby enable Germany to obtain the legitimate supply of foodstuffs and industrial raw materials, the German government would recognize this as an invaluable contribution to the more humane conduct of warfare and willingly draw conclusions from the new situation thus created."

This note, which appealed from formal law to the spirit of law and pointed to a path to restoring humane warfare, was initially successful. On February 22, the American government addressed an identical note to the German and British governments with a proposal whose essential content was: Submarines should be used against merchant vessels only to enforce the right of arrest and search; neutral flags may not be used by merchant ships of belligerent states. England will not detain foodstuffs and luxury goods intended for Germany if they are addressed to agencies in Germany designated by the United States for receipt and resale to the civilian population.

The German government replied on 28 February that it considered the American suggestion to be a suitable basis for a solution. It expressly declared its willingness to limit the activities of submarines against merchant ships to stopping and searching, provided that the misuse of the flag was stopped and the arrangements for the supply of food to Germany proposed by the American government were implemented, with which it, for its part, agreed. It merely proposed an addition regarding the supply of raw materials that would serve the peaceful national economy.

The British Government, however, rejected the American proposal on 13 March 1915, arguing that Germany had not unconditionally accepted the suggestion, also contained in the American proposal, regarding the limitation of the use of sea mines, which made it unnecessary for the British Government to give a further reply.

This concluded the American mediation effort.

Meanwhile, the American government did not return to the German U-boat note of February 16, 1915, until there were actual cases where American ships and the lives of American citizens had been destroyed by submarine warfare. The first such case occurred on March 28, 1915, when an American citizen lost his life in the sinking of the English passenger steamer "Fallaba." On April 28, a German aircraft mistakenly attacked the American ship "Cushing." On May 1, the American ship "Gulflight" was sunk, killing two American citizens. Finally, on May 7, the large English

passenger steamer "Lusitania" was torpedoed by a German U-boat; more than a hundred Americans, including many women and children, found their death in the waves.

The excitement in America was immense. It was not dampened by the fact that the German embassy in Washington had placed an advertisement in the American newspapers expressly warning against using English passenger steamers for trips to the war zone. Quite the opposite! The American government described it as "a surprising irregularity" that the German embassy had addressed the American public with such a warning against the exercise of proper American law by the American press. Nor was the excitement dampened by the German reference that the "Lusitania" was armed and had large quantities of ammunition on board—this statement by the German government was disputed by the American government, whose authorities had cleared the ship.

On May 15, the American government delivered a note in Berlin in which it raised the most serious representations. Going beyond the individual cases at hand, it stated that submarine warfare against merchant ships was not feasible without disregarding not only international law but also the rules of equity, reason, justice, and humanity. Furthermore, it could not believe that the U-boat commanders could have committed their unlawful acts other than under a misunderstanding of the orders given by the German naval authorities. It demanded that the German government condemn the actions of the U-boat commanders, provide satisfaction for the damage caused, and finally, take immediate measures to prevent further similar incidents. "The Imperial Government," the note concluded, "will not expect the Government of the United States to leave any word unsaid or any act undone which may be necessary to fulfill its sacred duty to preserve the rights of the United States and its citizens, and to secure their exercise and enjoyment."

This note was followed by diplomatic correspondence in which the American government increasingly articulated its position that only actual resistance by a merchant vessel or its continued attempt to escape after an order to stop for search had been issued gave the commander of a submersible the right to endanger the lives of those on board; the German government, on the other hand, took the position that it could not admit that American citizens could protect an enemy merchant vessel by the mere fact of their presence on board. Furthermore, the question of armament and the munitions cargo of the "Lusitania" was discussed. Finally, the German side put forward proposals to ensure the free movement of sufficiently marked and pre-notified American passenger steamers with England. This latter proposal was categorically rejected by the American government in a note dated July 23, 1915, as it effectively contained an agreement for the partial suspension of those principles whose recognition by Germany the American government had to insist on. More vehemently than ever before, the American government refused to discuss its policy toward Great Britain with the German government and to grant any significance to England's behavior toward Germany for the discussion between America and Germany on the issue of submarine warfare. "If a belligerent cannot retaliate against an enemy without harming the life and property of neutrals, both humanity and justice, and due respect for the dignity of neutral powers, should demand that the proceedings be discontinued." The demand for

condemnation of the actions of the German naval officers in the sinking of the "Lusitania" and for compensation for the damage caused was repeated emphatically, and the conclusion of the note contained the phrase that the American government would not tolerate a repetition of actions by commanders of German naval forces that violated the rights of American citizens should be considered a "deliberately unfriendly act."

However, the sharp note from the American government of July 23, 1915, echoing the hope expressed in the preceding German note for the restoration of freedom of the seas, contained a passage that stood in striking contrast to the warlike conclusion. This passage read:

"The Government of the United States and the Imperial German Government are fighting for the same great purpose and have long stood together for recognition of the very principles upon which the Government of the United States now so solemnly insists. They are both fighting for the freedom of the seas. The Government of the United States will continue to fight for that freedom, from whatever quarter it may be violated, without compromise and at any price. It invites the Imperial German Government to practical cooperation at the present moment when that cooperation can most prevail and this great purpose can most strikingly and effectually be attained. The Imperial German Government has expressed the hope that this purpose may, in some degree, be attained even before the close of the present war. This can be done. The Government of the United States not only feels itself bound to insist upon this object, by whomever it may be violated and disregarded, for the protection of its own citizens; it is also most interested in seeing this object realized between the belligerents themselves, and is always ready to act as a mutual friend, privileged to suggest a course of action."

Alongside the barely veiled threat of severing relations in the event of further damage to the rights claimed by the American government for its citizens through our submarine warfare, there was also a willingness to cooperate with us to restore freedom of the seas, even during the war. This presented German policymakers with a decision of the greatest significance.

Although, as Secretary to the Treasury, I was not directly involved in dealing with these issues, I did have certain points of contact with the complex of issues raised by the submarine war, apart from occasional discussions with the Chancellor and my friends in the Foreign Office.

For some time, I had been concerned with the issue of cotton imports from the United States. People who played a major role in the German cotton trade had contact with their American counterparts. We had contacted business associates and were negotiating with them to conclude a very large order at a fixed price. The large and influential American cotton interests had been severely damaged by the suspension of sales to Germany. Our task was to mobilize these interests in our favor and, with their help, not only secure supplies of American cotton to Germany, but also, if possible, to induce American policymakers to take decisive action to restore the London Declaration. The financing of this gigantic deal made the German interests consider the support of the Reich necessary, and so the matter came to my attention. The cooperation now offered by the American government for restoring freedom to the seas aroused my particular interest.

Furthermore, the design of our relationship with the United States was of particular importance for the financial warfare. Even previously, the banks of the United States had provided some support to the Entente countries—and to a much lesser extent to us—in the form of commercial loans and the assumption of short-term Treasury bonds. But this financial assistance had proved ineffective, especially since President Wilson had initially encouraged the issuance of public bonds. In favor of a belligerent state, the United States had declared it contrary to neutrality, operating within narrow limits far below the Union's capabilities. No one could doubt that a transition of the United States to the side of our opponents would result in the full deployment of its financial power, which had grown enormously during the war, in favor of the Entente. For the Entente, this would represent a significant simplification not only of the financial but also of the economic conduct of the war, while for us it would be a correspondingly more difficult task.

But even quite independent of the interests of my particular department, it seemed to me a truly fatal mistake to allow the submarine war to lead to a break with the United States and to overlook or reject Wilson's offer to restore the freedom of the seas, "by whomever it may be violated and disregarded." Both economic reasons and the political situation, especially the critical situation in the Balkans, on whose development the fate of the Dardanelles and Turkey depended, seemed to leave me no doubt about the correct course, especially since the success of the submarine war did not remotely meet expectations.

I presented my views to the Chancellor first orally and then, on 5 August 1915, also in writing. My proposal was to reply to the American government: We accept the cooperation offered to restore freedom of the seas. Provided that the American government is willing to take immediate, effective steps with the British government to induce it to abandon its naval warfare, which violates international law, and to return it to strict observance of the London Declaration, the submarine commanders, while maintaining our fundamental position, have been instructed to conduct submarine warfare until further notice in a manner consistent with American principles. We reserve the right to take all necessary measures in the event that joint action does not achieve the desired result within a reasonable time.

This approach would have had the advantage of practically eliminating the threatening differences with America for the next period, which are so important for decisions in the Balkans, and of giving President Wilson a free hand for the action against England that he had promised, without tying our hands for the time being.

My proposal, however, found no support at the Foreign Office, and the Chief of the Admiralty Staff, in an immediate report to the Kaiser, strongly opposed my suggestion and its justification. The Kaiser, however, agreed with my reply, in which I maintained my opinion, giving detailed reasons for it; but in the meantime, the situation had deteriorated considerably due to the torpedoing without warning on 19 August of the passenger steamer "Arabic", which was sailing from England to America; once again, American citizens were killed in this sinking.

Fortunately, even before the "Arabic" was torpedoed, an order had been issued to the submarine commanders that "liners" should only be sunk after prior warning and after the rescue of non-combatants, unless a ship attempted to escape or offered resistance. The commander of the submarine that sank the "Arabic" had believed that the "Arabic" was preparing to ram his submarine. The order issued to the submarine commanders was now communicated to the American government. As the negotiations continued, which verged on war, Count Bernstorff confirmed to Secretary of State Lansing on October 5, 1915, that the orders given to the submarine commanders were so precise that a recurrence of incidents similar to the Arabic incident was considered impossible. At the same time, the German government acknowledged that the attack on the "Arabic" had not been in accordance with the orders given, that it did not approve of the incident and regretted it; the commander of the submarine had been informed accordingly. The German government also declared its willingness to pay compensation. Naturally, given the current situation, no further conditions or prerequisites regarding the steps to be taken by America against England could be attached to this announcement. The opportunity to take Wilson's offer and to seriously test his willingness to take joint action against England's naval warfare had thus been taken away from us by the sinking of the "Arabic." A final resolution had also not been achieved; Lansing emphasized in particular that the "Lusitania" matter was not yet closed for the American government. But the immediate danger seemed to have been averted. Furthermore, for the first time in a long time, the American government was now mustering up the courage to take a decisive step toward the Entente. In a very detailed note of November 5, 1915, it explained the illegality of the naval warfare favored by the Entente under England's leadership and declared that the United States was determined, without hesitation, to assume the task of championing the rights of neutrals and to devote its full energy to the fulfillment of this task.

In our own camp, the question of our attitude towards America had led to a serious crisis. After the Kaiser had adopted the position advocated by the Reich Chancellor, Admiral von Tirpitz submitted his resignation, which was rejected by the Kaiser (in early September 1915). Instead, Admiral von Holtzendorff was appointed Chief of the Admiralty Staff in place of Admiral Bachmann. At the same time, an Imperial Order redefined the responsibilities of the Imperial Naval Office and the Admiralty Staff. A second resignation request from Admiral von Tirpitz followed, but was again rejected.

The "intensified submarine war"

On January 18, 1916, Mr. Lansing made a proposal—later described as unofficial—on submarine warfare to the representatives of the Entente powers in Washington, which essentially amounted to the following:

He acknowledged that submarines had proven effective in combating enemy commerce and that, consequently, their use for this purpose could not simply be denied to belligerents. It was therefore a matter of finding a formula that would bring submarine warfare into line with the general rules of international law and the principles of humanity without destroying its effectiveness. His

proposal was: On the one hand, submarines should be required to engage in "cruiser warfare," that is, merchant ships should not be sunk, i.e., without ordering them to stop, searching them for contraband, and bringing the crew and passengers to safety. On the other hand, merchant ships should not be allowed to carry any weapons. In support of this proposal, Lansing argued that, given the design of submarines, even light armament would give merchant ships an advantage; any armament of a merchant ship under these circumstances would have the character of an armament for offensive purposes. The letter concluded: "I would like to add that my Government finds it understandable that, given the nature of submarine warfare and the weakness of submarines in defense, a merchant ship carrying any armament should be regarded and treated by both neutrals and belligerents as an auxiliary cruiser, and that my Government is seriously considering instructing its officials accordingly."

This suggestion looked like a serious attack on the Entente's naval warfare. The disarmament of all merchant steamers and their obligation to stop without resistance upon request, to allow themselves to be inspected, and to be sunk after the enemy's nationality or the presence of contraband had been established, would have made the actions of German submarines against the Entente's maritime trade virtually risk-free and would have significantly increased their effectiveness. Rejection of this suggestion by the Entente powers was therefore to be expected. However, in such a case, the Lansing letter concluded with the threat that the American government would henceforth regard and treat armed merchant ships as auxiliary cruisers. This meant not only that armed merchant ships would be subject to the restrictions applicable to warships during their stay and traffic in United States ports, but also that the United States government would waive any objection to the sinking of such armed merchant ships by German submarines, even if the torpedoing occurred without warning and without the rescue of the ship's crew and passengers.

The Entente was thus indeed faced with a grave dilemma. Had the United States government adopted and adhered to Lansing's ideas, the Entente would have had only one way out: by returning to the London Declaration, it would have been possible to purchase the limitation of submarine warfare to the methods of "cruiser warfare." Was Lansing's letter to the Entente representatives aiming in this direction? Was it intended to be a drastic addition to the still-unanswered note from the American government of November 5, 1915, which had expressed such strong opposition to British naval methods?

I still can't answer this question today, because neither then nor now did I have sufficient insight into what was happening beyond the Atlantic Ocean. And the subsequent development of events not only provided no answer, but presented us with a puzzle.

After Lansing had addressed that letter to the Entente representatives on January 18, 1916, he reopened the "Lusitania" question with Count Bernstorff at the end of January, which had been expressly left pending during the settlement of the "Arabic" case. He demanded not only compensation, but also an explicit declaration that we were granting this compensation "in recognition of the illegality" of the sinking of the "Lusitania." We viewed such a concession not

only as a humiliation imposed on us, but also as a definitive and unconditional renunciation of the more severe form of submarine warfare, which we could hardly decide to adopt since there were no guarantees of any kind for a reduction of our enemies' naval warfare to the norms of international law. Lansing, however, insisted on his demand with the utmost tenacity and vehemence. The situation once again escalated to the brink of a rupture of relations. On 5 February 1916, the Wolff Bureau published a conversation between Undersecretary Zimmermann and the Berlin correspondent of the Associated Press, in which he said, among other things, that he did not want to conceal the seriousness of the situation. Germany could under no circumstances recognize the illegality of submarine warfare in the war zone. The entire crisis was due to America's new demand that Germany recognize the sinking of the Lusitania as an act contrary to international law. Germany could not relinquish its submarine weapon. If the United States wanted to allow a rupture, there was nothing Germany could do to prevent it.

In a conversation with the representative of the "New York World," the Reich Chancellor confirmed Zimmermann's statements.

While our relationship with the United States was experiencing this new and unexpected escalation, fierce internal struggles were taking place over submarine warfare.

Towards the end of 1915, the Admiralty Staff, under its new chief, again took a stand in favor of resuming submarine warfare without any restrictions. It expected that a ruthlessly conducted submarine campaign would defeat England within six months and thus bring a victorious end to the war. Compared to this prospect, all other considerations, including the repercussions of unrestricted submarine warfare on the United States, would have to give way.

By the turn of the year, the Chief of the General Staff, General von Falkenhayn, was virtually won over to unrestricted submarine warfare. He hoped to defeat England within a few months.

During this period, political parties and the press also took increasingly sharp stances on the issue of submarine warfare. The naval authorities engaged in vigorous propaganda in favor of unrestricted submarine warfare, which clearly influenced the opinion-forming forces of political circles and the public.

The Chancellor resisted the strong pressure. While the differences over the settlement of the Lusitania issue were already leading so close to a rift between America and us, the rift, and the resulting war, seemed certain if unrestricted submarine warfare were to be launched. The Chancellor was unwilling to accept responsibility for this.

In contrast, at the beginning of February 1916, the leading figures agreed on the so-called "intensified submarine warfare," namely the sinking of armed enemy merchant ships without warning and without consideration for the crews and passengers.

The German Navy had obtained instructions to various British merchant ships, which indicated that the armed ships should not wait for attacks by German submarines and defend themselves

against them, but should, wherever possible, attack the submarines. The German government concluded from this that enemy merchant ships armed with guns no longer had the right to be considered peaceful merchant vessels. It communicated this view to the neutral governments in a memorandum on February 8, 1916, which concluded with the announcement that, after a short period of time, taking into account the interests of the neutrals, the German naval forces would receive orders to treat such ships as belligerent vessels.

There were different opinions about the advisability of this step, especially because the ability to detect a merchant ship's armament through a submarine's periscope was a rather dubious matter, and errors seemed inevitable. I couldn't shake the impression that the gentlemen from the Navy were saying "intensified submarine warfare" but meant "unrestricted submarine warfare." That couldn't end well. Moreover, I would have preferred to resolve the "Lusitania" matter first, rather than complicating the already critical situation with a new measure of such magnitude. However, I had not been involved in the negotiations that had led to the proclamation of "intensified submarine warfare" and learned of the *fait accompli* by a statement made by the naval representative at the press conference.

After all, the "intensified submarine warfare" was based on a view that essentially coincided with that developed by Lansing in his letter of January 18 to the Entente representatives. This fact, one might assume, was enough to make the "intensified submarine warfare" appear justifiable in the eyes of the American government as well.

This hope seemed all the more justified because at that time, a current in public opinion and in congressional circles in the United States was emerging that rebelled against the idea of a war between America and Germany and, in order to reduce the danger of war, demanded that the American government warn American citizens against using armed enemy merchant vessels or even prohibit them from traveling on armed enemy vessels. Motions to this effect were even introduced in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

It was all the more striking that the American government now took a strong stance against the German interpretation of the nature and effects of arming merchant ships, which was so closely related to that expressed by Lansing. President Wilson himself intervened, by addressing and publishing a February 24, 1916 letter to Senator Stone, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, in which he took the position that the announcement of intensified submarine warfare was in such blatant contradiction to the explicit assurances given only recently by the Central Powers that he must await further explanations. He added: He could not tolerate any abridgement of the rights of American citizens; the honor and self-respect of the nation were at stake; America desired peace and would preserve it at any price, but not at the price of its honor; to forbid Americans from exercising their rights for fear of being compelled to stand up for them would indeed be a deep humiliation and, moreover, not only a tacit but even an explicit acquiescence to the violation of the rights of humanity and a conscious renunciation by America of its hitherto proud position as

the spokesman for law and justice. America could not yield without declaring its own impotence as a nation and relinquishing its independent position among the nations of the world.

On March 3, 1916, the Senate voted 68 to 14 to postpone indefinitely the discussion of the Gore Resolution, which would have prohibited Americans from traveling on armed enemy merchant ships.

Three weeks later, on March 25, the American government published a memorandum on its position on the treatment of armed merchant ships in neutral ports and on the high seas. The memorandum concluded, based on highly casuistic deductions, that a neutral government could treat an armed merchant ship in its ports on the presumption that it was armed for attack and therefore had the character of a warship; however, a belligerent on the high seas had to act on the presumption that the merchant ship was armed for defensive purposes and therefore had the character of a merchant ship. The status of an armed merchant ship on the high seas as a warship could only be determined on the basis of conclusive evidence of its intent to attack.

Two days earlier, on 23 March, the British government had rejected Lansing's suggestion of 18 January as incompatible with the general principles of international law and with certain clauses of the Hague Convention.

The strange interlude of Lansing's proposal remained unexplained. We now had to face the same American resistance, indeed even more pronounced resistance, in conducting the intensified submarine war against armed merchant ships. We can expect a similar situation, as in our first submarine war. Every day could bring a new incident that would make the crisis more acute and force us to choose between war with America or limiting submarine warfare to the legally acceptable forms of cruiser warfare.

In this situation, the demand for unrestricted submarine warfare grew into a veritable storm against the Reich Chancellor. The Navy, which had pushed through "intensified submarine warfare," had no intention of settling for it. The Admiralty had commissioned a comprehensive memorandum on the English economy and submarine warfare, which, based on extensive statistical material but with entirely amateurish reasoning, attempted to prove that "unrestricted submarine warfare" would, within a maximum of six months, lead to the success of forcing England to make peace by disrupting maritime traffic. Expert opinions on the memorandum were requested from numerous prominent figures in industry, commerce, and the banking world, who, with the prudent selection of respondents, consistently endorsed the memorandum's conclusions, albeit with more or less cautious reservations. The manipulation of the press and public opinion in favor of unrestricted submarine warfare was all the more effective because it was impossible to refute the claims and arguments circulated in favor of submarine warfare without committing treason.

At that time, on behalf of the Reich Chancellor, I had studied in detail the memorandum prepared by the Admiralty Staff. Based on the experiences gained during the first submarine war, England's still relatively intact economic reserves, the excellent world harvest, especially the record harvests

in the supply areas closest to England, the amount of shipping still available to England, etc., I had to conclude that even if the sinkings envisaged by the Admiralty Staff were fully implemented, there was no guarantee that England would be defeated within the foreseeable future. On the other hand, I could not help but estimate the dangers of a war with America to be considerably higher than those advocated for unrestricted submarine warfare.

In the first half of March, at the instigation of the Navy, the question of unrestricted submarine warfare was again brought up for decision at the High Headquarters. The Reich Chancellor prevailed with his view. It seems that the Chief of the Admiralty Staff and the Chief of the General Staff could not escape the weight of his arguments either. On this occasion, the Chancellor insisted also on putting an end to the Navy's propaganda in favor of unrestricted submarine warfare. The Kaiser ordered the separation of the Intelligence Department from the Reich Naval Office and its integration into the Admiralty. This measure was the immediate cause of the resignation of Grand Admiral von Tirpitz. In his place, Admiral von Capelle, who shared the Reich Chancellor's views on the submarine issue, was appointed State Secretary of the Reich Naval Office.

The Reichstag's Budget Committee addressed the submarine issue in confidential meetings at the end of March. Even the Conservatives and the section of the National Liberals who strongly supported unrestricted submarine warfare ultimately refrained from proposing a resolution to this effect. After lengthy negotiations between the parties, a resolution was passed that read:

"After the submarine has proven itself to be an effective weapon against the English warfare calculated to starve Germany out, the Reichstag expresses its conviction that it is necessary, as with all our military means of power, to make use of the submarine as well, which guarantees the achievement of a peace that secures the future of Germany. In negotiations with foreign states, the freedom to use this weapon in a manner that upholds Germany's maritime standing must be preserved, while also respecting the legitimate interests of neutral nations."

It was further agreed that the submarine issue should not be discussed in the plenary session of the Reichstag.

The "Sussex" case

Meanwhile, what had to happen happened.

The sinking of ships with Americans on board increased. Between March 27 and April 1, the American ambassador had to inquire to our Foreign Office, in preparation for further action, in no fewer than five cases whether the sinking had been carried out by a German submarine. The most serious of these cases was the torpedoing without warning on March 24, 1916, of the unarmed passenger steamer "Sussex," which carried passengers across the Channel. Of more than 300 passengers, approximately 80 were killed, including several Americans. The commander of the submarine suspected of being the torpedoed vessel stated that he had torpedoed a minelayer of the new British "Arabis" class. The time and place coincided with the torpedoing of the "Sussex," and the fragments of a German torpedo found in the hull of the "Sussex" cast no doubt on this fact.

With this catastrophe, whose magnitude almost rivaled the sinking of the "Lusitania," our relationship with America was on the brink of collapse. The United States' attitude left no room for ambiguity. After our original assertion, based on the submarine commander's statements, that the sunken ship was not identical to the "Sussex" had been refuted, the American ambassador delivered a note to the Under Secretary of State on April 20. Its significance was further underscored by the fact that President Wilson personally read it to Congress immediately before its delivery.

The most important content of the note was:

The tragic case of the "Sussex" is unfortunately not an isolated one; it is only one instance, albeit one of the most serious and distressing, of the deliberate method by which merchant ships of all types and purposes are destroyed indiscriminately. The German government has evidently found no way to impose the restrictions it had promised on its submersibles. "Again and again, the Imperial Government has solemnly assured the United States Government that, at least, passenger ships would not be treated in this manner, and yet it has repeatedly allowed its submarine commanders to disregard this assurance without any retribution. As recently as February of this year, "It gave notice that it would consider all armed merchant vessels belonging to the enemy as part of its adversaries' naval forces and would treat them as warships, thus obliging itself, at least implicitly, to warn unarmed vessels and to guarantee the lives of their passengers and crews; but even this limitation was blithely disregarded by its submarine commanders." The United States government had shown much patience and had not given up hope that the German government would be able to reconcile submarine warfare with the principles of humanity embodied in international law; it had made every concession to the new circumstances, for which there were no precedents, and had been willing to wait until the facts had become unmistakable and open to only one interpretation. That moment had now come. If it were the intention of the German government to continue submarine warfare against merchant ships without regard for what the American government must regard as the sacred and incontestable norms of international law and the universally recognized precepts of humanity, then there was only one course for the American government: "Unless the Imperial Government should now immediately declare and effect an abandonment of its present methods of submarine warfare against passenger and cargo ships, the United States government may have no choice but to sever diplomatic relations with the German government."

At the time this note was delivered, the Chancellor was at General Headquarters. He immediately returned to Berlin to discuss the situation. On Easter Sunday and Easter Monday (April 23 and 24), extensive conferences took place in which the State Secretary of the Reich Naval Office, Admiral von Capelle, in contrast to the Chief of the Admiralty Staff, Admiral von Holtzendorff, expressed the view that reducing submarine warfare to the form of cruiser warfare would not severely impair the effectiveness of submarines; the vast majority of sinkings were already carried out by surfaced boats using artillery fire, and with the progressive enlargement of submarine types and the reinforcement of submarine artillery equipment, the ratio in favor of sinkings by artillery

would increase even further in the future. These explanations made it easier for us to make the already almost unavoidable decision to reduce submarine warfare, at least temporarily, to the form of cruiser warfare. I referred to my suggestion of August 1915 to establish a connection between this concession and the efforts then offered by Wilson to restore freedom of the seas. It seemed questionable whether this connection should be established in the form of a "condition" or "precondition" for our concession, or in the form of a mere "expectation." The decision in favor of the latter view was finally made by a confidential and friendly communication from the Spanish ambassador, who declared that he had become firmly convinced that a concession subject to conditions or preconditions would be regarded by the American government as insufficient and would necessarily lead to an immediate severance of relations, followed by war.

The Chancellor returned to Headquarters on April 25, while the Foreign Office began working on the text of the reply. Before his departure, the American ambassador had expressed to the Chancellor his wish, or at least his willingness, in a manner tantamount to a wish, to travel to Headquarters and personally explain the American position to the Kaiser. Indeed, on April 28, Mr. Gerard received an invitation to come to Headquarters. He was received there on May 1 in the presence of the Chancellor by the Kaiser, who discussed German-American relations and the submarine question with him in order to gain a direct understanding of the American perspective.

The settlement of the submarine question in the spirit discussed in Berlin had meanwhile encountered a major difficulty at headquarters: General von Falkenhayn, who only eight days earlier had told the Chancellor that, in his opinion, a conflict with America must be avoided, now argued with the Kaiser against limiting submarine warfare to the forms of cruiser warfare; he would have to forgo continuing the action against Verdun if the submarine warfare were suspended, because even a complete success of the Verdun operation would not be worth the sacrifices if the suspension of the submarine warfare gave the British breathing room and the French hope for further British assistance. The Kaiser was greatly impressed by Falkenhayn's view and said to the Chancellor on April 30: "So you have the choice between America and Verdun!" The Chancellor was extremely agitated by this alternative. The thought of appearing before history as the man responsible for the sacrificing of 100,000 men at Verdun seemed as unbearable to him as the responsibility for the break with America. He informed me of the situation by telephone and asked me to come to headquarters immediately.

I arrived in Charleville the following day, May 1, during the afternoon and found the situation already clarified. The Chief of the Admiralty Staff had submitted to the Chancellor's political reasons. The Kaiser had expressed to the Chancellor that a break with America must be avoided and had agreed to the course of action proposed by the Chancellor.

The next evening, after dinner, the Kaiser spoke to me at length about the submarine issue. I had the impression that the decision had lifted a heavy burden from his mind. He spoke wittily and intelligently about his conversation with Mr. Gerard. If one wanted to engage in politics, one had to know, above all, what the other person was concerned about; for politics was, after all, a two-

way business. Gerard's comments had confirmed to him that Wilson was looking for a ladder to the new presidency. We would rather offer him the ladder of peace than the ladder of war, which would ultimately fall on our own heads.

Our reply note was presented to the American ambassador on May 4. It stated, in response to the Union Government's appeal to the sacred principles of humanity and international law, that "it was not the German but the British Government that extended this terrible war to the lives and property of non-combatants, in violation of all legal norms agreed upon between nations, and without any consideration of the harm caused by this to the interests and rights of neutrals, which have been severely damaged by this form of warfare. In this state of affairs, the German government could only express its regret once again that the humanitarian feelings of the American government, which were so warmly extended to the unfortunate victims of submarine warfare, did not extend with the same warmth to the many millions of women and children who, according to the declared intention of the British government, were to be driven to death by starvation. The German government, and with it the German people, had all the less understanding for this disparity in sentiment, as it had repeatedly declared its readiness to strictly adhere to the norms of international law recognized before the war in the use of submarine warfare, provided that England was prepared to apply these norms to its conduct of the war. If the German government nevertheless decided to make such an extreme concession, the decisive factor for it was the consideration of the grave disaster with which an extension and prolongation of this cruel and bloody war threatened all of civilized humanity. The awareness of its strength has allowed the German government to express openly and before the whole world twice in the course of the last few months its readiness for a peace that would secure Germany's vital interests. It has thereby expressed that it is not her fault if the peoples of Europe are denied peace any longer. The German Government is all the more justified in declaring that it would be irresponsible before humanity and history to allow, after 21 months of war, the dispute arising from submarine warfare to take a turn that seriously threatens peace between the German and American peoples. The German Government intends to prevent such a development, as far as it lies with it. At the same time, it intends to make one final contribution to making possible—as long as the war lasts—the restriction of warfare to the combatant forces, a goal that includes the freedom of the seas, and in which the German Government still believes itself to be in agreement with the Government of the United States. Guided by this thought, the German Government informs the Government of the United States that instructions have been issued to the German naval forces not to sink merchant ships without warning and saving lives, unless they flee or offer resistance, in compliance with the general principles of international law concerning the arrest, search, and destruction of merchant vessels, even within the naval warfare zone."

The conclusion of the note expressed the expectation "the new directive to the German naval forces will also, in the eyes of the government of the United States, remove every obstacle to the realization of the cooperation offered in the note of July 23, 1915, for the restoration of the freedom of the seas to be achieved even during the war. "; the German government has no doubt that the

American government will now demand and enforce from the British government the observance of the international norms of naval warfare. "Should the steps taken by the United States not lead to the desired result of ensuring the application of the laws of humanity to all belligerent nations, the German government will find itself confronted with a new situation for which it must reserve full freedom of decision."

The note thus brought about the return of submarine warfare to the internationally recognized forms of cruiser warfare. However, this concession was not made permanently; rather, the German government reserved a free hand in case America failed to persuade England to adapt its naval warfare to international law.

This resolved the crisis in our relationship with the United States for the time being.

Nothing more was achieved.

That since last July Wilson's willingness to cooperate with us in restoring the freedom of the seas had at least diminished considerably, was shown in the American response to our note. This reply, dated May 10, 1916, took note of our explanations and added:

"The United States Government considers it necessary to declare that it considers it a foregone conclusion that the Imperial Government does not intend to imply that the maintenance of the newly announced policy depends in any way on the course or result of diplomatic negotiations between the United States Government and any other belligerent government, although certain passages in the Imperial Government's note of the 4th inst. may be susceptible of such an interpretation. However, to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding, the United States Government informs the Imperial Government that it cannot for a moment entertain, let alone discuss, the idea that the respect by the German naval authorities for the rights of American citizens on the high seas should be made dependent in any way or in the slightest degree on the conduct of any other government affecting the rights of neutrals and non-combatants. Responsibility in these matters is separate, not joint, absolute, not relative."

To what extent the Western powers believed they could profit from the German-American tension is evident from the fact that on 24 April 1916 the British government completely rejected the American proposals of 5 November 1915 on the grounds that these held British naval warfare to be contrary to international law, and that on 7 July 1916 the British and French governments jointly informed the neutral powers that they no longer considered themselves bound by the London Declaration, which they had already increasingly riddled with holes.

Bethmann Hollweg's efforts to achieve an American peace step

As events developed, the submarine question and the peace question became intertwined. In view of the false impression that has arisen among some politicians and probably also among a large section of public opinion regarding the interrelationship between these two issues, it seems appropriate to me to attempt, as far as I am able, to unravel the tangled threads.

Already during the Berlin discussions on the reply to be given to the American government on the U-boat note of 20 April, the Reich Chancellor developed the idea that our hardly avoidable concession would not only eliminate the acute danger of conflict, but to use it, if possible, to initiate peace. Feelers extended in various other directions in recent times had yielded no results or threatened to yield no results. The Chancellor believed that President Wilson might be tempted to play the great world-historical role of peacemaker. The above-quoted reference to our repeatedly demonstrated readiness for peace in our note of May 4th goes back to this idea of the Chancellor. The Chancellor also touched on this point in conversations with Mr. Gerard. Mr. Gerard relates in his book that the Chancellor said to him upon his departure from Headquarters: "I hope that if we settle this matter now, your President will be great enough to take up the question of peace." Mr. Gerard further relates that the Chancellor later demonstrated to him on various occasions that America must do something for peace and that if nothing were done, public opinion in Germany would certainly force the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare.

The Chancellor first spoke to me about a step taken by Wilson to persuade him to take action aimed at peace when I was in Berlin on 31 August 1916, after Romania had declared war and after Hindenburg had been appointed head of the General Staff of the Field Army, together with State Secretary von Jagow, arrived at Headquarters. The Chancellor, who had already traveled to Pless two days earlier, outlined the situation for us, which he considered extraordinarily difficult despite the confidence of Hindenburg and Ludendorff. We must do everything possible to achieve peace. The only way he saw at all led through Wilson, and this path must be taken, even if the prospects were uncertain. Wilson alone, he said, possessed the important position among our opponents necessary for an effective step towards peace. We must tell Wilson that we are prepared to surrender Belgium, on the proviso that we will regulate our relations with Belgium after its restitution through direct negotiations.

The idea was discussed in detail between the Chancellor, Mr. von Jagow, and myself. It seemed to me that appealing to Wilson was countered by the fact that, during the course of the war so far, he had shown an ever-increasing bias in favor of the Western powers and a poor understanding of our German circumstances and vital needs. His conduct since the beginning of 1916 seemed to me to leave no room for doubt as to his attitude toward us. I also feared that if we entrusted Wilson with the task of mediating peace, he would lead us before an international conference in which our enemies would judge us. I did not mention the immense unpopularity of calling on Wilson as peace mediator; I knew that the Chancellor was fully aware of this, but that such considerations would not dictate his decision. An understanding with Russia at the expense of Poland, whose future status the Chancellor and Jagow had recently negotiated in Vienna, if necessary even with concessions in Eastern Galicia, which the Chancellor had reoccupied, and which our Austro-Hungarian ally would have to be prepared to make if necessary, still seemed to me to be the most favorable path to peace for us. The Chancellor, however, believed there was little hope in this direction after all soundings had failed, including the hints made with the consent of our Turkish

ally of a settlement of the Straits question that would meet Russia's wishes. Herr von Jagow agreed with the Chancellor.

In fact, in the first week of September, the Chancellor telegraphed Count Bernstorff in Washington to personally ask him about his opinion of Wilson as a peace mediator. Count Bernstorff replied that nothing could be expected from Wilson before the presidential election in early November; if he were re-elected, which was likely, he would probably take over the task of mediating peace, as he seemed convinced that it is in America's interest that neither of the two power groups be defeated.

Mr. Gerard claims that, in the course of September, Mr. von Jagow urged him to travel with his wife, who wanted to go to America for a short time, to persuade the President to do something for peace. I cannot say how true this is.

In any case, the President's zeal to take a step toward peace at our request was not all that great, even though he promoted himself as the "peacemaker" during the presidential elections. Even after he was re-elected at the beginning of November, he did not hurry to do anything in favor of peace or even to let the German government know in any way that he intended to take a step toward peace in the near future. The American chargé d'affaires in Berlin, Mr. Grew, avoided any sounding out by making the issue of the forced deportation of the Belgian unemployed, in which regrettable mistakes had occurred, the center of German-American relations. Mr. Gerard reports in his book that he spoke with President Wilson before he began his return journey to Germany on December 4. His impression was that the President wished above all else to keep peace and to make peace. "Of course," Mr. Gerard continues, "this question of making peace was a very delicate one. A direct offer on our part might expose us to the same treatment we accorded Great Britain during the Civil War, when Great Britain made announcements for the purpose of bringing about peace, and the Northern States gave a reply to the effect that the British Government should mind its own business, that they would brook no interference, and that they would regard further announcements as unfriendly acts. The Germans started this war without any consultation of the United States, and then they seemed to think that they had a right to demand that the United States make peace for them on such terms and at such a time as seemed good to them, the Germans; that further, if we did not do so, they would have the right to violate all the rules of warfare and to murder citizens of the United States on the high seas. Nevertheless, I believe the President was inclined to go very far in bringing about peace."

From these statements by Mr. Gerard, one thing emerges with certainty: that when Mr. Gerard left America on December 4, 1916, President Wilson had not yet decided on any definite step in favor of peace and that Mr. Gerard had not received any answer to the overtures made by Mr. von Bethmann and Mr. von Jagow. Furthermore, Mr. Gerard's remarks provide an insight into the spirit in which our suggestion that the President take an initiative in favor of peace was received, at least by Mr. Gerard.

The German and American peace move

On October 23, 1916, Lord Grey delivered a striking speech at a press banquet. He began by addressing the causes of the war, again attempting to shift all blame onto Germany. Then, with a bow to Wilson and Hughes, the two American presidential candidates, he moved on to a hymn to the League of Nations and arbitration courts as the pillars of the system that must prevent the outbreak of new wars in the future.

The report of the speech was presented in Berlin on October 25. The Chancellor was deeply impressed by the speech. He found it very cleverly tailored to the mentality of the neutrals, especially the Americans, but also to the mood of the warring nations, who longed for a better state of coexistence between nations, instead of the destruction and murder. The idea of a League of Nations and arbitration courts has undoubtedly been greatly strengthened. He also believes that this idea has a future. He feels that German policy cannot stand aside in this matter. He must, in any case, respond to Grey's speech in this sense.

It seemed to me that the question of preventing future wars was secondary as long as the question of ending the current war remained unresolved. The best answer to Grey seemed to me to be one that Grey posed to this practical question. Two days earlier, Constantza had been taken by our troops; that morning, a telegram had reported the capture of Cernavoda. The Romanian campaign was nearing its end. Our enemies were about to lose hope once again. Winter, and with it the third winter campaign, was just around the corner. If any moment since the beginning of the war had to make governments and peoples consider whether it was worth continuing the war, it was the present one. I recommended considering whether the overall situation did not give us the right and duty to speak openly about peace, to which our enemies would have to respond—for example, a call to the belligerents to meet to discuss the possibility of a peace that would preserve the honor, existence, and freedom of development of all.

The Chancellor warmed to the idea and decided to go immediately to the Kaiser, who was then staying in Potsdam. As he was about to get into his car, he received news of the French's successful advance on Fort Douaumont outside Verdun. This dampened the Romanian joy, but such incidents must always be expected in war.

The Kaiser immediately agreed. The Chancellor traveled to Headquarters that same evening to consult with Field Marshal von Hindenburg. The Field Marshal refused to oppose the proposal and declared that, in any case, he could not offer any prospect that, after the conclusion of the Romanian campaign, which was expected in a few weeks, a decisive military strike could be delivered in the winter or the following spring to enforce peace.

Now the ambassador von Stumm was sent to Vienna to secure the consent of our Austro-Hungarian ally. There was no doubt about the fundamental agreement since, as the Chancellor told me, Baron Burian himself had already suggested a similar course of action on previous occasions.

After the Chancellor had presented his case to the Emperor again on this basis, the Emperor wrote the following handwritten letter to the Chancellor:

“New Palace, 31. 10. 16.

My dear Bethmann!

I reflected on our conversation thoroughly afterward. It is clear that the peoples of our enemies, caught up in war psychosis, held by lies and deceit in the delusion of battle and hatred, have no men capable of the moral courage to speak the liberating word. Proposing peace is a moral act necessary to free the world—even neutrals—from the oppressive pressures on everyone. Such an act requires a ruler who has a conscience and feels responsible to God, and a heart for his own people and his enemy, who, unconcerned about the possible deliberate misinterpretations of his action, has the will to free the world from its suffering. I have the courage to do it; I will risk it on God's word. Present the music to me soon and prepare everything.

Wilhelm IR"

The following weeks were filled with negotiations with our allies on the basic principles of the aims to be pursued in a peace conference, on the nature of our joint action, and on the text of the announcement to be issued concerning our readiness for peace or the note to be delivered to the Allies.

Meanwhile, the Chancellor responded to Grey's speech in the Reichstag's Main Committee on November 9, 1916. He refuted Grey's presentation of the question of guilt and, with much-noticed emphasis, sided with the League of Nations and the arbitration courts. He did not yet mention the planned proposal for peace negotiations. It had been agreed with our allies that the peace step should be taken as soon as the averting of the Romanian threat had become obvious to everyone through the imminent fall of Bucharest.

That any consideration for President Wilson could be an obstacle to an immediate peace step was never mentioned to me in the numerous discussions that took place on this matter by any of the gentlemen who were involved in Wilson's discussions. So far, no reply had been received to the suggestion made by Mr. von Bethmann to Mr. Gerard at the beginning of May. The telegram addressed to Count Bernstorff at the beginning of September did not instruct him to take any action with Mr. Wilson or the American government that could have restricted the German government's freedom of movement, but merely asked him for a personal opinion on Wilson's inclination to take a step towards peace. The possibility that Wilson, after his election as President on November 6, 1916, might do something in favor of peace, could not, as long as no agreement had been reached with us on this matter or at least the definite intention of such action had been communicated to us, restrict our right of our own initiative, nor relieve us of the obligation to seek other paths that could lead to peace and to use a moment that seemed appropriate to us for a peace action.

In fact, it is clear from the passage in Gerard's book quoted above that on December 4, that is to say, four weeks after his re-election, Mr. Wilson had in any event not yet envisaged any specific step in favor of peace and, for his part, did not feel himself in any way bound by us on the question of peace.

I mention this expressly because it was later alleged in Germany that German policy had played a double game with President Wilson by first asking him to mediate peace and then, after Mr. Wilson had agreed to do so, taking action of its own.

Personally, it seemed to me quite desirable for the German government to keep the initiative for peace in its own hands; for I could not overcome my unease at the thought of Wilson leading peace affairs. Furthermore, much as I was unwilling to swim with the current of public opinion, I could not conceal from myself that the anti-American sentiment among the army and people had become an increasingly serious obstacle to American peace action. Ultimately, it also depended on the first step toward peace being supported as unanimously as possible by one's own people and not being subjected to strong hostility from the outset out of feelings whose justification could not be denied. The fact that America's behavior toward the German people in the struggle for its existence was only formal neutrality, but in substance a strong favoring of our opponents, was clear to everyone. Wilson had stood in our way in the exploitation of our submarine force against England. That was his formal right; but the exercise of this right toward us involved, at the very least, the moral obligation to insist, with equally stringent means, on the strict observance of international law toward England as well. For more than six months, we had given in on the submarine issue; but the American government had not yet made any attempt to bring England back to the ground of international law. Our bitterness was exacerbated by the ever-increasing quantities of military equipment and munitions that America supplied to the Entente. Mr. Wilson had done the Mexican Carranza in February 1914 by prohibiting arms deliveries to his opponent, Huerta, in view of the material impossibility of supplying arms to Carranza, who was cut off from the coast. The sophistry of international law with which the United States government justified this "paper neutrality" did not register with our people. Especially since the field-grey soldier, showered with American missiles, saw only the tremendous support that America unilaterally provided to our enemies.

On December 6, 1916, Bucharest fell. The time had come for the peace operation.

On December 12, the Chancellor delivered a note to the representatives of the neutral powers, who had undertaken to protect our interests in the states hostile to us, requesting that it be transmitted to the states at war with us. The same happened at the same time in Vienna, Constantinople, and Sofia. After the party leaders had been informed the day before, the Chancellor immediately informed the Reichstag of the completed step. After a brief and effective overview of the situation, he stated:

"According to the constitution, on August 1, 1914, His Majesty the Kaiser personally had to make the most difficult decision a German had ever had to make: the order for mobilization, which was wrested from him by the Russian mobilization. During the long and difficult years of war, the

Kaiser was driven by the sole thought of how peace could be restored to a firmly secured Germany after a victorious battle. No one can testify to this better than I, who bear the responsibility for all government actions. In the deepest sense of moral and religious duty to his people and, beyond that, to humanity, the Kaiser considers the time has now come for an official peace action. His Majesty has therefore, in full agreement and in conjunction with his high allies, decided to propose to the hostile powers that they enter into peace negotiations."

The Chancellor then read out the note, which, in view of its importance for the question of peace, may be reproduced here in full:

"The most terrible war that history has ever seen has been raging for almost two and a half years in a large part of the world. This catastrophe, which the bond of a common, millennial civilization has not been able to halt, strikes humanity in its most valuable achievements. It threatens to lay in ruins intellectual and material progress that was the pride of Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century.

"Germany and her allies, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, have demonstrated their invincible strength in this struggle. They have achieved tremendous successes over their opponents, who were superior in numbers and material. Their lines hold unshaken against the ever-repeated attacks of their enemy armies. The recent onslaught in the Balkans was swiftly and victoriously repulsed; recent events prove that even a prolonged war will not be able to break their power of resistance, and that the overall situation justifies the expectation of further successes.

"In defense of their existence and their freedom of national development, the four Allied Powers were forced to take up arms. Even the glorious deeds of their armies have not changed this. They have always held fast to the conviction that their own rights and legitimate claims do not conflict with the rights of other nations. They do not seek to crush or even destroy their opponents.

"Supported by the consciousness of their military and economic power and prepared to fight the battle imposed on them to the utmost if necessary, but at the same time motivated by the desire to prevent further bloodshed and put an end to the horrors of war, the four Allied Powers propose to enter into peace negotiations as soon as possible. The proposals they will bring to these negotiations, aimed at securing the existence, honor, and freedom of development of their peoples, they believe form a suitable basis for establishing a lasting peace.

"If, despite this offer of peace and reconciliation, the struggle should continue, the four Allied Powers are determined to carry it to a victorious end. However, they solemnly disclaim any responsibility for this before humanity and history."

On the same day, an Imperial Army Order was issued which read:

"Soldiers! In the spirit of victory you have achieved through your bravery, I and the rulers of the loyally allied states have made a peace offer to the enemy. Whether this goal will be achieved

remains to be seen. You must continue, with God's help, to stand firm against the enemy and defeat him."

The reception of the peace proposal in Germany was not uniformly positive. Conservative and predominantly national-liberal circles feared that the proposal could be interpreted abroad as a sign of weakness and impair the impact of our victories in Romania. Among those who sincerely welcomed the peace proposal as a serious attempt to free Germany and the world from the misery of war, there was widespread criticism that the proposal did not list our concrete peace conditions.

I still consider both exhibitions to be unjustified.

The question was either to achieve peace or to establish responsibility for the continuation of the war before the entire world—both before our own people and the peoples of neutral countries and our enemies. If the war was to continue, then our own people, in particular, needed moral support, given the enormous pressure on them, in the awareness that it was not our fault if peace negotiations did not come about. The danger that our enemies might perceive our offer as weakness could not be allowed to prevail; moreover, by choosing the right timing, this danger had been prevented as far as possible.

A public disclosure of our individual peace conditions would be, without a basic willingness on the part of our enemies to talk with us about a peace that would preserve the honor, existence, and freedom of development of our people, the opposite of expedient. We would have committed ourselves entirely one-sidedly, thereby placing ourselves at a severe disadvantage vis-à-vis our adversaries and making any negotiation on points once publicly mentioned extremely difficult. It is easy to criticize "secret diplomacy." But as long as human nature has not fundamentally changed, the purpose of any negotiation—namely, understanding—will always be easier to achieve in confidential consultations than if the wrestling match between the negotiators takes place in public view. If our enemies had any inclination at all to talk with us about peace, it must have been enough for them that our peace note clearly stated: For us, the war remains a war of defense; for us, what matters is to secure the honor, existence, and freedom of development of our peoples; our rights and claims do not conflict with the rights of other nations.

But our enemies had no inclination to talk peace with us. The goals they pursued, stubbornly pursuing despite all the sacrifices and setbacks, were incompatible with the defense of our possessions, with the preservation of our honor, our existence, and our freedom of development. Their governments feared that any initiation of peace talks would weaken the will to war aimed at our defeat, and therefore they were extremely quick to reject our proposal sharply.

The very day after our peace proposal, on December 13, 1916, the French Prime Minister Briand declared our call for peace negotiations a maneuver to sow discord among the Allies, confuse consciences, and demoralize the peoples. On December 16, the new Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Pokrovsky, rejected the Central Powers' peace proposal "with indignation" and contrasted it with the goal "that lies at the heart of all of us: the destruction of the enemy." All the countless sacrifices

would be in vain if a "premature peace" were concluded with an enemy whose forces, although weakened, were not broken. On December 18, the Italian Foreign Minister, Mr. Sonnino, implored the House not to pass anything that might suggest that Italy might adopt a different attitude from its allies in accepting the "treacherous step" taken by Germany. The following day, Lloyd George, who had since replaced Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister, spoke in his usual manner about Prussian military despotism and demanded as prerequisite for any peace talks from Germany "complete restoration, full satisfaction and effective guarantees".

Now President Wilson also appeared on the scene.

On December 21, 1916, the American Embassy Counselor in Berlin handed over a note to Secretary of State Zimmermann, which was also sent identically to the other belligerent states.

The note contained a proposal for peace. The President of the United States proposed "that an opportunity be taken as soon as possible to ascertain from all the now belligerent states their views on the conditions under which the war might be brought to a conclusion, and on the provisions which might afford satisfactory assurances against the recurrence of war or the rekindling of any similar conflict in the future, so that an opportunity may be afforded for openly comparing them. The President, the note continued, is free to choose the means suitable for achieving this end. He is quite willing to assist in any acceptable way, or even to take the initiative, towards the attainment of this end; he does not, however, wish to determine the manner and the means. Any course will be acceptable to him, provided only the great end which he has in view is attained." The note then pointed out that the general aims of the two belligerent parties, according to the statements made by their statesmen, were essentially the same. The interest of the United States in future measures for the protection of international peace was as great as that of any other nation. The American people and their government longed to cooperate in the achievement of this goal by all the means at their command. But first, the war must be ended. The concrete aims for which the war was being fought had never been definitively determined. The world was left to conjecture "what final results, what actual exchange of guarantees, what political or territorial changes or shifts, even what stage of military success would bring the war to an end." The President was not proposing peace, he was not even offering mediation; he was only suggesting "that soundings be made so that neutrals and belligerent states may know how near the goal of peace may be, for which all mankind yearns with ardent and growing desire."

This was the essence of Wilson's peace move.

What was remarkable about the clothing of this core was the repeated strong emphasis on the interest of the United States in the speedy end of the war, which was already evident from the fact that "they would be manifestly compelled to make provisions for the best possible protection of their interests if the war were to continue"; further, a remark on the relationship between Wilson's suggestion and the peace step taken by the Central Powers. The President, the note stated, had long been considering his proposal. He made it now not without some embarrassment because it might appear as if he were prompted by a desire to play a role in connection with the latest proposal of

the Central Powers. In fact, the President's idea was in no way attributable to this proposal, and the President would have waited to make his proposal until the Central Powers' proposal had been answered if his suggestion did not also concern the question of peace, which was best discussed with other proposals along these lines. The President thus established the independence of his suggestion from the Central Powers' proposal but recommended joint discussion.

In essence, President Wilson's proposal amounted to the same goal that the Central Powers had envisioned in their peace negotiations: a mutual exchange of concrete peace terms. This exchange, if a unilateral determination of one or the other of the two aspects was to be avoided, had to take place step by step, and in the view of the Central Powers, would be best conducted in the more flexible form of a direct and personal exchange of ideas between the warring powers.

This corresponded to the response issued by the Central Powers a few days after the American note was presented. The German reply of December 26, 1916, which corresponded in substance to that of our allies, read as follows:

"The Imperial Government has accepted and considered the generous suggestion of the President of the United States of America to lay the foundations for the establishment of a lasting peace in the friendly spirit expressed in the President's communication. The President indicates the goal that is dear to his heart and leaves the choice of path open. The Imperial Government considers a direct exchange of ideas to be the most appropriate way to achieve the desired result. It therefore has the honor, in the spirit of its declaration of the 12th inst., which offered its hand to peace negotiations, to propose the immediate meeting of delegates from the belligerent states at a neutral location. The Imperial Government also believes that the great work of preventing future wars can only be undertaken after the end of the present international struggle. When this time has come, it will be happy to cooperate with the United States of America in this noble task."

Even Wilson's peace proposal did not in any way deter the Allied governments from their determination to reject peace talks and continue the war. Only a brief delay in the Entente's reply to our peace proposal, hastily announced by Mr. Briand for December 20, was probably caused by Wilson's peace move, which had already been announced in London and Paris on December 19. But Wilson's intervention did not change the content of the Entente's reply, which Mr. Briand presented to the American ambassador in Paris on December 30 for transmission to the Central Powers: no reply could have been more harshly and sneeringly dismissive. In a tendentious presentation, it once again attempted to prove that the "war was desired, provoked, and carried out by Germany and Austria-Hungary." Since Germany had violated its obligations, the peace it had broken could not be based on its word. A proposal without conditions for the opening of negotiations was not a peace offer. The devastation caused by Germany's declaration of war, the numerous assassinations carried out by Germany and its allies against the belligerents and against the neutrals, demanded atonement, reparations, and guarantees. Germany cunningly evaded both. The proposal made by the Central Powers was, in reality, nothing more than a war maneuver designed to impose a German peace and intended to confuse public opinion in the Allied countries.

"Fully recognizing the gravity, but also the necessities of the hour, the Allied Governments, closely united among themselves and in full accord with their peoples, refuse to consider a proposal without sincerity and without significance."

Since this reply, which left nothing to be desired in terms of clarity, came more than a week after President Wilson's peace move, not only the Central Powers' peace proposal, but also Wilson's peace suggestion had to be considered a failure. Once again, it became clear that the hostile coalition was not prepared to talk about peace as long as it was not in a position to dictate peace as it saw fit. The spirit that prevailed among the rulers of our enemies, despite the Romanian setback, is testified to by a daily order from the Tsar to the Russian army and navy dated December 25, 1916, which stated as Russia's war aim "the possession of Constantinople and the Straits, as well as the creation of a free Poland in all its three presently separate parts."

At least one could be curious about the response our enemies would give to Wilson's peace proposal. For here they faced not an enemy they were determined to fight to the death, but the representative of the strongest neutral power, whose attitude could prove decisive for the outcome of the war.

It took three full weeks for the Allies to agree on a reply to Wilson; it was not until January 10, 1917, that it was handed over by Mr. Briand to the American ambassador in Paris.

The reply contained many fine words addressed to Mr. Wilson and about future international peace. In substance, however, it was a rejection of Wilson's proposal that was hardly less blatant than the reply to the Central Powers.

"The Allies," the note stated, "feel as deeply as the Government of the United States the desire to see an end as soon as possible of this war, for which the Central Powers are responsible and which is inflicting cruel suffering on humanity; but they consider it impossible to secure at this stage a peace which would assure them the expiations, reparations, and guarantees to which they are entitled as a result of the aggression for which the Central Powers were responsible and which aims precisely at destroying Europe's security." After long complaints about the Central Powers' illegal and cruel conduct of the war, which had become a constant mockery of humanity and civilization, the note declared that the reply to the Central Powers' peace proposal of December 12, 1916, presented to the Central Powers through the mediation of the United States, answered the question posed by the American government. Moreover, the Allies' war aims were well known; they had been set forth several times in declarations by the heads of the various governments. "These aims will be discussed in detail, with all compensation and just reparations for the damage suffered, only at the hour of negotiations. But the civilized world knows that they include everything necessary, and first and foremost the restoration of Belgium, Serbia, and Montenegro, the compensation owed to them, the evacuation of the territories occupied by France, Russia, and Romania, with just reparations, the reorganization of Europe, guarantees for a lasting peace, the return of the provinces and territories formerly belonging to the Allies." by force or against the will of the population, the liberation of the Italians, Slavs, Romanians, Czechs and Slovaks from

foreign rule, the liberation of the populations who are subjected to the bloody tyranny of the Turks, and the removal of the Ottoman Empire from Europe because it is undoubtedly alien to Western civilization." The note added that it was, of course, never the intention of the Allied governments to seek the "annihilation of the German peoples and their political disappearance"; they only wanted to secure peace on the basis of liberty, justice, and inviolable fidelity which has always animated the Government of the United States.

The rejection of any peace talks with the Central Powers was particularly aggravated by the objection to equal treatment with them. "With satisfaction," the note stated, "the Allies note that the American communication bears no connection with the action of the Central Powers; they do not doubt the determination of the American Government to avoid even the faintest semblance of moral support for those responsible for the war. The Allied Governments consider it their duty to express themselves in the most friendly but clearest manner against equal treatment based on public statements by the Central Powers and in direct contradiction to the obvious state of affairs, both with regard to past responsibilities and guarantees for the future." President Wilson certainly did not intend to join them by mentioning them."

The door to peace could not have been slammed shut more loudly. When the Allies refused to allow Mr. Wilson to treat them on an equal footing with the Central Powers, this was a harsh rejection of all good offices that a third party could possibly offer to bring about an understanding between the two warring groups.

In fact, the peace conditions briefly outlined by the Entente governments meant nothing less than the complete destruction of Turkey, the complete dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the mutilation and humiliation of Germany. The Allies were right in stating that it was impossible to achieve a peace in accordance with these wishes now; for only a completely defeated enemy could they assume would allow such conditions to be discussed even for a moment.

The case was therefore clear: the Central Powers were ready to talk about a peace that would fulfil their defensive aim and secure the honour, existence and freedom of development of their peoples; the Entente refused to negotiate on this basis with the open justification that it was based on the destruction, mutilation and humiliation of the Central Powers, a "peace goal" for which, in their opinion, the Central Powers were not yet ready.

We shall see later how Mr. Wilson responded to this answer.

The unrestricted submarine war

The German note of May 4, 1916, had relegated submarine warfare to the cruiser war, thereby preserving peace with America. This avoided extreme hardship for a period that first brought us the tremendous thrust of the Russian offensive in Volhynia and Galicia, the successful renewal of the Italian offensive on the Isonzo, then the French and English attacks on the Somme, which surpassed all others in their intensity and duration, and finally the Romanian invasion.

We had reserved to ourselves a free hand in the conduct of submarine warfare vis-à-vis America in the event that our expectation that the United States Government would succeed in enforcing the observance of the international norms of naval warfare in England should not be fulfilled.

The expectation was not fulfilled. No serious attempts by the American government to persuade England and the other Entente powers to abandon their violations of international law through trade and starvation blockades were known to have occurred thereafter.

Propaganda in favor of unrestricted submarine warfare had temporarily subsided under the impression of the imminent danger of a rupture with America. It picked up again during the summer. The Navy, too, began to take up the issue of submarine warfare again, especially since the massive deployment of materiel in the Battle of the Somme suggested considering whether the supply of this materiel to our enemies could not be somewhat restricted by a more effective approach to submarine warfare. Even with Admiral von Capelle, who in the spring had firmly maintained that the hopes placed by its proponents in unrestricted submarine warfare were exaggerated and that, given the dubious success, political concerns would have to prevail, I had the impression that he was increasingly taking the position that if the Supreme Army Command now demanded unrestricted submarine warfare to relieve the hard-fought Western Front, then the Navy would not be able to refuse its assistance, even if this assistance were estimated modestly.

Meanwhile, the submarine trade war around England had been completely or almost completely stopped, while in the Mediterranean, it continued with reasonable success in the form of cruiser warfare. According to the Admiralty, sinkings fell from 225,000 tons in April 1916 to 101,000 tons in June 1916.

Towards the end of August 1916, the Chief of the Admiralty Staff officially reopened the submarine issue. He informed the Chancellor that, after a careful examination of the situation, he had become convinced that the time had now come to initiate unrestricted submarine warfare, and requested an immediate discussion of the matter.

This meeting took place on August 31, 1916, at the General Headquarters in Pless. Participating were the Reich Chancellor, the newly appointed Chief of the General Staff, Field Marshal von Hindenburg, General Ludendorff; the Chief of the Admiralty Staff, Admiral von Holtzendorff, Admiral von Koch; the Minister of War, General Wild von Hohenborn; the State Secretary of the Foreign Office, von Jagow; and myself, as State Secretary of the Interior and Deputy Chancellor. The entire political, military, and economic situation was discussed in detail, as were the technical possibilities and the military and economic effects of submarine warfare. The situation was primarily dominated by the Romanian declaration of war and the invasion of large Romanian troops into Transylvania. All the troops we could muster anywhere had to be thrown against Romania. Nothing had been prepared, and nothing could be prepared in the near future, for eventualities such as a break with America and strong combined pressure from the Entente and the United States on our neighboring neutrals. Under these circumstances, Generals von Hindenburg

and Ludendorff declared that until the Romanian threat had been eliminated, the Supreme Army Command could not assume responsibility for initiating unrestricted submarine warfare.

The course of the consultation left no doubt that the two generals were inherently in favor of unrestricted submarine warfare. It was to be expected that they would return to the issue as soon as the course of military operations in Romania permitted. Through the constant pressure from the proponents of unrestricted submarine warfare, public opinion had become increasingly convinced that with submarines, we had a weapon in our hands which, if used correctly, would allow us to bring England to its knees within a few months and thus put an end to all the sacrifices and suffering of the war. Even in those Reichstag parties that had previously shown restraint on the submarine issue, such as the Center Party and the Liberals, the submarine warfare propaganda was not without effect.

This became apparent when, at the beginning of October 1916, the Reichstag's Main Committee again addressed the submarine issue.

The mood of the committee had noticeably changed compared to March, when the last U-boat discussion had taken place. Furthermore, the committee believed that it could discern from the speech with which Herr von Bethmann introduced the discussion, and even more so from the speech by Admiral von Capelle, which followed the Chancellor's speech, a lessening of opposition to unrestricted submarine warfare. The members' judgments were also strongly influenced by several factual factors that had undoubtedly improved the prospects for the success of unrestricted submarine warfare, such as the significant increase in the number and the considerable improvement in the capabilities of U-boats since the beginning of the year, as well as the threat to England's supply of grain for bread posed by a mediocre harvest at home and an excessively poor harvest in the United States and Canada. Added to this was the growing bitterness against the United States, which was supporting our opponents with ever-increasing quantities of war material, indeed, thereby making the Battle of the Somme, in its immense dimensions, possible in the first place. Having submitted to their pressure on the submarine issue, they evidently did not lift a finger to bring England, which was increasingly intensifying its war of hunger against us and our neighboring neutrals, back to the principles of international law. I had a difficult time advocating for prudence and consideration of the dangers threatening us from a transition to unrestricted submarine warfare, given the mood this created.

In my replies to statements from members of the Commission, I endeavored to present the situation calmly and objectively. I readily admitted that the shape of the world harvest in 1916 had increased the possibility of complicating, perhaps even endangering, England's food security through submarine warfare. England's own harvest of bread grain in 1916 had yielded only 6 million quarters, compared to 8.7 million quarters the previous year. The wheat harvest of the United States and Canada for 1916 was estimated at only 21.5 million tons, compared to 37.5 million tons the previous year. Yet, in the previous harvest year, England had covered no less than 88% of its import needs from these two nearest regions. Recourse to Argentina, or even India and Australia, was

extremely difficult in view of the palpable shortage of freight space; the freight route from these regions to England was two to three times as long as the freight route from North America, so bringing the same amount of grain required two to three times the shipping capacity. England's visible grain stocks in the second half of September 1916, after the harvest, were lower for the first time than at the same time the previous year; they amounted to 8.6 million quarters compared to 10.6 million quarters, while at the beginning of May 1916 they had been 1.8 million quarters higher than at the beginning of May 1915.

But I could not help but cast serious doubt on this moment, which had become more favorable for the success of unrestricted submarine warfare.

Even in the area of bread grain supplies for England, the large American stocks from the previous year's harvest could not be neglected. Whether it would be possible to reduce supplies from these stocks and the admittedly scarce new harvest through unrestricted submarine warfare to such an extent that they would be insufficient to supplement the stocks in England, which were sufficient for at least 4.5 months, was at least an open question.

Likewise, I had to counter the calculations that were supposed to prove that a monthly sinking of 600,000 tons of merchant shipping would be enough to bring England to its knees, or at least wear it down, within a certain time—six to eight months were spoken of. I found that the British merchant fleet (excluding that of the Dominions and possessions) was, according to the last figures in June 1916, still 1,882,500 gross tons strong. I admitted that of this, about 7 million were used for military purposes, and that the remaining 12 million or so for private trade could be reduced to 8 million tons within 6 to 8 months through unrestricted submarine warfare. But I pointed out that the British merchant fleet had accounted for almost half of the world's entire merchant fleet before the war, that it had handled sea freight not only for England but for half the world, that Germany's merchant fleet, the largest in the world after England, had only just exceeded 5 million gross tons before the war, and that with these 5 million tons, in addition to our own supplies, we had also been able to secure a considerable share of international freight traffic. In addition, England had the option of drawing on the cargo space used for military purposes in an emergency. I concluded: "No one in the whole world can say with certainty that England will no longer be able to continue fighting after six or eight months due to a lack of cargo space."

I also warned against underestimating British tenacity, the possibility that the English could impose restrictions on themselves as we had to do, and finally to underestimate the British ability to organize.

Above all, however, I emphasized the dangers of a break and war with the United States. The opinion was expressed within the committee that America would not break with us because of submarine warfare, or at least would not go to war with us. In response, I stated: "Over the years, I have never heard any other opinion from all the people I have seen who have come over from America than this: If you start ruthless submarine warfare, you will have a break and war with America."

I could not share the repeatedly raised doubts as to whether America, if it declared war on us, would be of significantly greater benefit to the Entente and significantly more harm to us than it already is in the state of so-called neutrality. I explained that the financial aid which the Americans had previously only granted to the Entente powers within relatively narrow limits and under quite difficult conditions was easily capable of a very considerable increase; furthermore, that American steel production, which at 40 million tons annually was almost three times as large as ours, would allow the Americans, if they entered the war, a huge increase in their production of military equipment and material; that, finally, the danger of supporting the Entente through troop shipments was not a figment of the imagination. "The difficulties we have to contend with," I explained, "lie largely in the fact that the others have a great superiority in human resources. Do you think you can improve our position by throwing a civilized country with a strong, vigorous race, with more than 100 million inhabitants, onto the other side?" I also could not leave unchallenged the hope that our submarines would succeed in preventing the transport of ammunition and personnel from America to the Western Theater of War, although I knew that this hope was shared by influential figures in the Navy. "My optimism, in any case, does not go so far as to doubt that America could bring over significant numbers of troops in the event of war, even assuming that we sink some transport steamers. There are said to be 400,000 or more men still stationed in Salonika. This entire army has been transported and is receiving its supplies of replacements, ammunition, and provisions, despite our submarines operating in the Mediterranean. The troop transport steamers are simply much better protected on their journeys than other steamers."

I also asked for the effects of a war with America on our later reconstruction to be taken into account. The restoration of our foreign relations after the war is much harder than most people imagine. "But if neutrality has completely ended, then what the Entente dreams of today can become reality, namely, economic warfare after the war. Then we may be the boycotted dog for years to come, to whom no one in the entire world gives a piece of bread."

Above all, we must keep one thing in mind: "If the card of ruthless submarine warfare is played and it doesn't work, then we are lost, then we are lost for centuries."

My remarks certainly made some impression, but failed to achieve any decisive success. I had reason to return to my reservations several times during the discussion and to say to the ardent advocates of unrestricted submarine warfare: "We want to see clearly, we want to know exactly how things stand; and if submarine warfare is carried out, there should be no one who can later, if things go wrong, say: 'Well, if only we had been told this and that, if those in positions of responsibility had pointed out this and that.'"

The Chancellor could claim that his assessment of the situation was in agreement with that of the Supreme Army Command. More than any other reason, it was this fact that prevented an explicit majority decision in favor of unrestricted submarine warfare in the main committee. But even though no formal decision was reached, the course of the debate left no doubt as to the majority of the commission's position on submarine warfare. Of particular importance was the fact that the

Center Party, which had previously largely supported the Chancellor's position on submarine warfare, made the following statement on October 7, 1916, for the files of the Main Committee:

"On behalf of all[5] The following statement was made by members of the Centre Party in the Committee on the Reich Budget:

"The Chancellor alone is responsible to the Reichstag for the political decision regarding the conduct of the war. The Chancellor's decision will be based essentially on the resolution of the Supreme Army Command. If the decision is in favor of ruthless submarine warfare, the Chancellor can be assured of the Reichstag's consent."

This declaration by the faction that dominated the party relations in the Reichstag was not only a carte blanche, but a direct demand to the Chancellor to follow the decisions of the Supreme Army Command on the submarine issue. The Army High Command, which of course was not unaware of the course of the negotiations in the Main Committee and the Center Party declaration, now knew that if the Reich Chancellor were to oppose a demand by the Supreme Army High Command to open unrestricted submarine warfare in the future, he would no longer be able to count on the support of the Reichstag.

In the question that was decisive for the further development of the war, the position of the responsible head of German politics vis-à-vis the Supreme Army Command was thus weakened in a truly fatal way.

Every war contains the seeds of conflict between military power and political leadership. War as a "means of politics" is a violent and domineering means that, once activated, seeks to follow its own laws. A strong will and strong authority of the political leadership are required to remain master over the unruly servant and to prevent the means from usurping the place of the end. If the danger of such conflicts was particularly great in any country, it was in Germany. A strict military education had led our people from disunity, powerlessness, and misery to unity, power, and prosperity; it had liberated and secured our country, which for centuries had been the battlefield of foreign peoples; it had laid the foundations upon which our people could build a comfortable home through peaceful labor. It was the suffering of centuries that instilled in our people a respect for military power and its representatives. Even more than our people, the Hohenzollern dynasty, whose leader embodied the unity of the Reich, stood firmly on military tradition. Even a thoroughly peaceful figure like Wilhelm II was caught up in the great military traditions of his house; indeed, one could say that the less he was a warrior and general at heart, the more he was under the spell of those who powerfully embodied the soldierly spirit and military command.

The difficult conflicts that Bismarck, despite his towering personality and his firmly established authority with the king and the people, had to fight with the military authorities in the Franco-Prussian War are well known. This war lasted barely nine months. In the World War, which dragged on from year to year, we had no statesman whose authority was based on the firm foundation of political feats and whose personality could exert a Bismarckian influence on the people and the

emperor. In contrast, since the Battle of Tannenberg, the military duo of Hindenburg and Ludendorff shone in all its glory. The German people, despite all the horrors we are currently experiencing, are in need of authority. They placed their entire devotion and all their hopes in the two generals who, right at the beginning of the war, in an unparalleled feat of arms, had liberated East Prussia from the Russian hordes, and who, as the war progressed, more than any other generals, captured the enthusiasm of the German people with their mighty blows. Added to this was the impression of the Field Marshal's great human personality and the iron willpower and fiery temperament of General Ludendorff. When the Kaiser called Hindenburg the "hero of the German people," he spoke from the heart of all men, and above all from his own. He had an emotional antipathy toward Ludendorff, which was the original reason why he resisted the appointment of the two to the head of the Supreme Army Command. Even later, he never warmed to Ludendorff; indeed, he occasionally vented his displeasure with Ludendorff in violent outbursts during confidential conversations. But he was nevertheless under the spell of Ludendorff's strength of will, and above all he submitted to the conviction that Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who were inseparable, were irreplaceable in the direction of military operations.

It was an effect and at the same time a strengthening of the preponderance of the military leadership over the political leadership when the strongest faction in the Reichstag made a statement that unequivocally placed the decision on the fateful question of the submarine war in the hands of Hindenburg and Ludendorff.

Anyone who knew Ludendorff's personality had to know that the Supreme Army Command's demand for the initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare would not be long in coming. And then, now that the Chancellor had also been deprived of parliamentary support, it was virtually irrefutable for anyone familiar with the personalities and circumstances: submarine warfare was launched. Nothing was strong enough to prevent it. The fury that we had been forced to endure England's shameful hunger war for more than two years without resistance, while, according to the declarations of the highest naval authorities, we had a sure means of breaking the hunger war, of betting one and a half on a rogue, and of ending the misery of war in a short time—the fury that America denied us the use of this weapon while allowing the enemy's hunger war to continue and supplying the Entente armies with military equipment and munitions for their terrible offensives—this fury could no longer be tamed or contained at the moment when Hindenburg and Ludendorff demanded from the Chancellor unrestricted submarine warfare, which had been approved in advance by the majority in the Reichstag.

There was only one way out, and that was to bring about peace negotiations; a way out which, as outlined above, was also suggested by the development of the overall war situation at that time, and for which it was possible to win over both the Supreme Army Command and, above all, the Emperor.

In the meantime, the effects of submarine warfare could be significantly increased, even within the limitations imposed by cruiser warfare. As mentioned above, after the conclusion of

negotiations with America regarding the Sussex Case, the Admiralty Staff had completely ceased submarine warfare against merchant ships in British waters and used submarines in the North Sea only for purely military purposes. In October 1916, despite the difficulties that cruiser warfare presented for U-boats, especially in British waters, due to the improved defensive measures, the Admiralty Staff decided to resume submarine warfare against merchant ships in cruiser warfare there as well. The success was considerable. The tonnage sunk in submarine warfare rose from 101,000 tons in June and 103,000 tons in July to 394,000 in October and 416,000 in December 1916.

But the Admiralty Staff was not satisfied with these successes.

He initially pressed for the resumption of the 'intensified submarine warfare,' that is, the unrestricted submarine warfare against armed enemy merchant ships. He also managed to win over the Supreme Army Command to this idea, which became urgent with its demand after the leading statesmen of the Entente had sharply rejected our peace proposal in their speeches immediately following it. An official response from the Entente powers to our proposal had not yet been received; President Wilson's peace move had only just taken place. The most elementary political wisdom dictated keeping quiet for the time being, even if, after the speeches of the enemy statesmen, one had to accept that peace negotiations would not take place.

On the evening of December 28, 1916, the Chancellor traveled to Headquarters with State Secretary Zimmermann and me. During the voyage, we discussed the submarine question. The Supreme Army Command had demanded the immediate dispatch of a note to the United States declaring unrestricted submarine warfare against armed merchant ships, without any consideration for any peacetime actions. Zimmermann also took the position that such a step could not be postponed any longer; he suggested waiting until January 2, 1917, at the latest. I opposed this most decisively. The effect of the proposed step on America, after all that had gone before, was bound to be the same as that of the initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare. We destroyed with our own hands the last remaining prospect of our own and Wilson's peace action; we further exposed ourselves to the suspicion that we were not at all serious about our peace proposal and that we intended to prevent the success of Wilson's move by taking a measure now, without waiting for a response and allowing the peace action to take effect, which we had to admit would destroy any possibility of peace and, precisely under these circumstances, would certainly bring about not only a rupture but war with America. The Chancellor agreed with me, and Zimmermann also seemed convinced.

In Pless, we received a reception from Field Marshal and General Ludendorff—the Kaiser was not present—which is only mildly described as "ice cold." The recent disagreements—as far as I am concerned, especially regarding the treatment of the Auxiliary Service Act—had evidently left a strong mark on our relationship. After a brief discussion, the two generals recognized our position on the issue of armed merchant ships as justified. I had the impression that they did not attach too much importance to this interim stage, but rather that they were concerned with the speedy

initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare. On this issue, the Chancellor declared that his^[398] His position would have to depend on the Entente's final position on the peace move by the Central Powers and Wilson, as well as on the further development of the overall situation. He could not yet make up his mind. The matter would have to be examined at the appropriate time, and if agreement could not be reached between him and the Supreme Army Command, the Kaiser would have to decide. This question was not dealt with in detail. I contented myself with stating that unrestricted submarine warfare would certainly cause considerable damage to England, but that no one could assert with certainty that England would be forced into peace within a certain time; despite the poor world harvest, the risk to us remained enormous.

A few days after our return to Berlin, the Entente's reply to our peace proposal arrived. The Chancellor had the justified feeling that this reply, despite all its harshness, required cautious treatment. If our efforts for peace failed, it had to be made clear to the world that the responsibility for the continuation of the war rested exclusively with the Entente. I have reason to believe that the new Austro-Hungarian Minister, Count Czernin, who had recently replaced Mr. von Burian and who was at General Headquarters on January 8 at the same time as State Secretary Zimmermann, was of the same opinion. Apart from all other weighty reasons, the attitude of Bulgaria, which was disgruntled because of a difference with our Supreme Army Command over Dobrudja and whose Prime Minister had hastened to declare in response to the Entente's reply in the Sobranje that Bulgaria's claims were modest and were recognized as legitimate by the Entente - which Bulgaria had not mentioned in its reply.

In this difficult and extremely tense situation, the later much-discussed banquet of the American Chamber of Commerce in Berlin took place in honor of Ambassador Gerard, who had returned from the United States, on the evening of January 6, 1917, at the Hotel Adlon. The banquet had been announced for some time, and State Secretary Zimmermann had undertaken to deliver a speech on this occasion. However, since Count Czernin had arrived with Zimmermann from the Main Headquarters in Berlin on the morning of January 6, and Zimmermann had to spend the same evening with Count Czernin at the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador, the Chancellor requested that I speak in Zimmermann's place at the welcoming ceremony of the American Chamber of Commerce. I discharged this task in a speech agreed upon with the Chancellor and Zimmermann, in which, after a few polite remarks, I thanked the Ambassador for his efforts in continuing his study of the German language to penetrate the spirit of the German character, I called upon the members of the American Chamber of Commerce, most of whom had been living in Germany for many years, as witnesses to "that our only ambition was to rise in the peaceful competition between nations through work and efficiency, to win and maintain our place in the world by raising our intellectual, moral, and economic standards." After a few words about the "militarism" of Germany and its enemies, I continued:

"I would still have much to add that moves your and our hearts. But as a guest at a neutral table, I do not wish to speak of things that divide the world. I do not wish to give the impression that I wish to infringe on your neutrality, that I wish to promote our cause with you. You know, we

demand nothing from the neutrals, no help, no favoritism, nothing but neutrality. Of course, a neutrality that measures both parties equally, shows both parties equal respect in the face of a life-and-death struggle of nations the likes of which the world has never seen. As merchants who have lived among us for many years, you have an understanding of our mentality and our vital needs. You form a bridge across the ocean for this understanding. I am convinced that this bridge will be of use now in the continuation of the war, as it has been made more difficult by the rejection of the proposed peace negotiations, and also later, when it is necessary to resume and continue the threads of intellectual and economic exchange between our countries."

I concluded with the wish that the merchant's peaceful ships might soon again sail the now bound, but in the future free, sea between Germany and the United States, for the benefit of both countries and peoples.

To this certainly not effusive greeting, which contained a serious reference to the dark cloud that had long hung over relations between Germany and America, Mr. Gerard responded in a strikingly cordial and friendly tone. His address culminated in the assurance that relations between the United States and Germany had never been better than at this moment, and that the continuation of these excellent relations was assured as long as men like Bethmann-Hollweg, Helfferich, Zimmermann, Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and Holtzendorff continued to guide Germany's destiny.

State Secretary Zimmermann arrived late in the evening. "In a brief speech, he expressed his conviction that the friendly and trusting relations which had already connected him with the American ambassador before his journey would continue to develop as amicably as the ambassador had described.

The event and the speeches delivered at it caused a great stir at the time. I was fiercely attacked in the press and later in the Reichstag's main committee for even appearing at the reception for Mr. Gerard, and even if I did, for behaving politely towards the guest of honor and not like a janitor. The political ignorance that characterizes us Germans has rarely been more clearly apparent to me than on this occasion. Everyone must have felt that at that time the final decision was at stake as to whether it would be possible to keep America out of the war. And even if an "after-dinner speech" couldn't achieve much effect, such a blatant snub of the American ambassador as staying away from that event or remaining silent, contrary to every American view, would have been the surest opposite of protecting our interests. It was simply a matter of combining the necessary courtesy with the preservation of our position and our dignity. I believe I did justice to this dictate of the situation.

I bear no responsibility for Mr. Gerard's exuberance. It astonished me that evening. My astonishment grew after I read in Mr. Gerard's book that he claimed to have received reliable information before that evening that the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare was a done deal. If this was the case, if Mr. Gerard consequently came to the ceremony on January 6 certain that war between the United States and Germany was imminent, how could he speak so highly of relations between the two peoples, which had never been better?

That evening, no decision had yet been made regarding the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. Personally, I still hoped that the impact of the German and American peace actions would be awaited before any decision was made.

But, of course, the decision was to be made more quickly than I had expected at the time, following the outcome of the meeting at General Headquarters on December 29.

On 8 January, the Chancellor received a telegram from Field Marshal von Hindenburg, requesting him to return to Headquarters as soon as possible to discuss the submarine issue again; the initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare could under no circumstances be postponed beyond 1 February. Shortly before, the Chief of the Admiralty Staff had handed the Chancellor a new memorandum, which he also sent to me with a Letter of January 6th. The memorandum itself was dated December 22nd. It estimated the British shipping capacity still available for supplying England at a maximum of 8 million gross tons and calculated that, in addition to a monthly sinking of 600,000 tons, one could reliably count on a deterrent of at least two-fifths of the neutral tonnage sailing towards England. This would reduce England's maritime traffic by 39 percent over the course of five months, and England would not be able to tolerate such a reduction. On the other hand, the submarine cruiser war, even if the armed merchant ships were released, would only be able to eliminate 18 percent of British maritime traffic in the same period, and that would not be enough to bring peace to England. War with America was indeed such a serious matter that everything must be done to avoid it; But fear of a breach must not lead to a shrinking back at the decisive moment from using the weapon that promised us victory. In order to achieve the necessary effect in time for the new harvest, unrestricted submarine warfare must begin no later than 1 February. A vigorous and forceful strike against English shipping promised absolute success. He, the Chief of the Naval Staff, did not hesitate to declare that, given the current circumstances, we could force England to make peace within five months through unrestricted submarine warfare.

The impression made by this memorandum on the Chancellor was reinforced by information given to him by a first-rate authority in our High Seas Fleet about their absolute confidence in the success of unrestricted submarine warfare during these same days.

The Chancellor decided to travel to Headquarters on the evening of January 8. Before his departure, he discussed the situation with Zimmermann and me. I made strong criticisms of the Admiralty's calculations. Furthermore, all three of us agreed that, above all else, the effects of the peace action, at least the Entente's response to Wilson, had to be awaited.

It was clear to me that the Chancellor would have to fight a difficult battle to enforce this position, and I reproached myself for not having insisted with all determination on accompanying him to headquarters. The matter gave me no sleep. That night, I reworked the entire 37-page printed folio memorandum from the Admiralty Staff and wrote a detailed telegram to the Chancellor, summarizing the points I considered crucial for assessing the success of unrestricted submarine warfare. The next morning, I had it telegraphed to the Chancellor in Pless.

In this telegram, I initially cast doubt on the Admiralty Staff's calculation that in five months, England's maritime traffic would be restricted by 39 percent due to unrestricted submarine warfare and only by 18 percent due to submarine-cruiser warfare. I pointed out that if seafaring neutrals entered the war, which was to be feared precisely as a result of unrestricted submarine warfare, the deterrent effect of submarine warfare on neutral shipping would be at least substantially eliminated. It was, of course, impossible to provide evidence as to what percentage of the restriction on British maritime traffic would lead England to no longer be able to endure. I acknowledged the memorandum's information on England's supply of bread grain as cautious, noting that, given the limited supply options, British stocks would continue to decline inexorably throughout January and February. However, I cautioned:

"If unrestricted submarine warfare results in America entering the war against us, then America is interested in England's victory as if it were its own. If England's defeat can only be averted by sufficient grain supplies, then America must and can make a sacrifice for this purpose which it, as a neutral state, does not consider: the restriction of its own grain consumption in favor of England. The restriction need not be achieved through rationing American bread consumption; large purchases, perhaps even forced purchases, by the American government could certainly achieve the same goal. Since the Union has more than twice the population of England, any restriction on per capita grain consumption by Americans represents more than twice the per capita allowance for Englishmen. If the fate of the war depends on it, I do not consider it impossible that America could implement a ten percent restriction on its normal consumption in favor of England, which would free up 1.7 million tons, equivalent to three months' English supply. Even if half of this were sunk en route to England—a percentage far beyond the possibilities calculated by the Admiralty Staff—such a course of action would be of valuable, perhaps decisive, assistance to England. As paradoxical as it may sound, the possibility cannot be ruled out that unrestricted submarine warfare, in contrast to submarine cruiser warfare, would ultimately not worsen, but rather improve, the English supply of bread grain.

Whether it will be possible or not to keep the neutrals out in unrestricted submarine warfare will be easier to assess in a few weeks, when the Entente's reply to Wilson is available, than now. There is no reason for hasty decisions. For, at present, time is working not against us, but for us, in matters of supplying England. January and February, for natural reasons of the season, are always unfavorable months for British grain imports. This time, the reduction in British imports, as a result of the poor American harvest, had actually begun in December; despite England's best efforts, grain imports for the four weeks of December had reached only 1,410,000 quarters, compared to 1,955,000 quarters the previous year. If, for the reasons outlined above, we were to postpone the decision on unrestricted submarine warfare for a few more weeks, we would have every chance of significantly further reducing the already scarce British grain stocks. The lower the stocks at the start of unrestricted submarine warfare, the faster and more certain the success would be.

Even this last attempt to at least achieve a postponement did not change the decision.

The Chancellor unexpectedly returned from Pless early on January 10. He sent me the head of the Reich Chancellery, who told me: "The Rubicon has been crossed."

I was deeply shocked by this news.

After a brief discussion, I asked Mr. Wahnschaffe to tell the Chancellor that, despite all my loyalty and devotion to him, I could not go along with this course and would resign. Wahnschaffe replied that my departure would naturally be the most convenient way out for me. The Chancellor, for his part, had refrained from insisting on his original decision to resign for compelling reasons. The Chancellor wished to discuss everything with me personally and requested that I not make any decisions until then.

I didn't see the Chancellor that day or the following day. I only went to see him when he summoned me on the evening of January 12.

He described the events in Pless to me. Upon his arrival, the head of the Navy Cabinet, Admiral von Müller, had informed him that the Kaiser, after severe internal struggles, had come to the conclusion that unrestricted submarine warfare was unavoidable. In the morning's conference with the Field Marshal, he and General Ludendorff had most urgently demanded that the land army, which was engaged in heavy fighting on all fronts, receive moral and material support through unrestricted submarine warfare. In the west, a new offensive by the French, English, and Belgians was to be expected in the spring, which in terms of force would even surpass the Somme Offensive of the past six months. Every opportunity to restrict the supply of material and personnel to the enemy must be exploited under all circumstances. Time is not to be lost. If unrestricted submarine warfare is not initiated by February 1, they, the two generals, cannot assume responsibility for the course of military operations. On the other hand, they are prepared to bear responsibility for all military consequences of unrestricted submarine warfare, including the consequences of intervention by European neutrals and America. Incidentally, they do not attach too much importance to American intervention.

The Chief of the Admiralty Staff, with his well-known arguments, had most decisively advocated the initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare on 1 February.

In view of the determination with which Hindenburg and Ludendorff declared the relief of the fronts through the immediate commencement of unrestricted submarine warfare to be indispensable, and with which they assumed responsibility for all military consequences of submarine warfare, and in view of the confidence with which not only the Chief of the Naval Staff, but also the High Seas Fleet and the State Secretary of the Imperial Naval Office—who had previously opposed unrestricted submarine warfare—within a few months predicted, even guaranteed, the full success of unrestricted submarine warfare, he, the Chancellor, had to ask himself whether he was justified before his conscience in advising the Kaiser not to comply with the request of the Supreme Army Command and the Naval Staff. His next thought was to request his resignation and not to appear at the meeting scheduled for 6:00 p.m. with the Kaiser. He also

informed the Chief of the Civil Cabinet of this intention. However, he had to convince himself, however difficult it was for him, that he could not evade his responsibility in this way. Since the Supreme Army Command had posed the question in such a way that unrestricted submarine warfare had become inevitable, and since he could not take responsibility for preventing it, even if it had still been possible, he was obliged to do everything possible to ensure the success of the submarine warfare. This included the German people and our allies uniting behind submarine warfare. If he resigned because of the initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare, this would not, on the one hand, prevent the initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare, but on the other hand, it would drive the internal dispute about submarine warfare, which would have to die down with the final decision to wage submarine warfare, to a head, and indeed completely destroy the internal front; furthermore, it would undermine the approval of our allies for unrestricted submarine warfare and thus our alliance system itself would be put at utmost risk. I, too, must ask myself the question of conscience whether, by submitting my resignation, I should make a demonstration that would not in the slightest change the opening of unrestricted submarine warfare, already ordered for February 1, but would instead bring confusion into our own ranks and to the front lines of our allies, weaken our confidence in the success of submarine warfare, and raise doubts about our success among our opponents and the neutrals from the outset. This is based solely on my personal judgment, in which I am virtually isolated among the competent advisors of the Crown, and in view of the fact that, in my opinion, the prospects for success of submarine warfare have improved considerably. I must ask myself this question of conscience all the more since it is primarily a matter of foreign policy and the conduct of the war, thus a matter that does not fall within the scope of my responsibility.

It was the hardest decision of my life.

"It was made somewhat easier for me by the fact that the Chancellor showed me the response note from the Entente to President Wilson, just published by Wolff, which—through the excessiveness of the implied war aims and the insolence of the refusal to place themselves on equal footing with Germany—destroyed any possibility of peace and had to convince any halfway impartial observer of our right to resort to extreme self-defense.

It was made more difficult for me by the consideration that there was only an either-or here: either protest and leave, or stay, but then accept the decision once made, stand on one's own ground and fight on that ground, as the general does his duty, even if he did not get his opinion through in establishing the plan of operations.

I left the Chancellor with the promise that I would help him to advocate the opening of unrestricted submarine warfare before the Reichstag as far as I could under the circumstances.

The decision taken at General Headquarters was that unrestricted submarine warfare would be waged against all maritime traffic within a narrowly defined restricted area around the British Isles and in the Mediterranean, starting on February 1. The decision was to be kept secret until the last moment. The unrestricted submarine warfare was to be announced to neutral countries only on

January 31, but with the proviso that neutral ships en route to ports within the restricted area on February 1 would be spared for a "reasonable period."

I found this kind of brief announcement just as pointless as it was provocative. But the Navy had insisted on this staging for 'naval technical reasons,' and the orders had already been issued by the time I learned of it.

I waited with anticipation to see how Mr. Wilson would react to the Entente's outrageous response to his peace proposal before the announcement of the start of the new submarine war. Perhaps there still lay a small spark of hope.

On January 22, President Wilson addressed a message to the American Senate, which he had transmitted to the belligerent governments the same day. The message provides important insight into the mindset and reasoning of its author, in whose hands the course of history had then placed the fate of old Europe.

The message began by censoring the replies given by the two warring groups to the President's peace proposal: "The Central Powers replied in a note which simply stated that they were prepared to meet with their adversaries in conference to discuss the terms of peace. The Entente Powers have replied in much greater detail and, although only in general outlines, yet with sufficient definiteness to include specific questions, have indicated the agreements, guarantees, and restorations which appear to them to be the indispensable conditions of a satisfactory settlement. We have thus come that much closer to the final discussion of peace, that is supposed to end the current war."

The President thus completely lacked understanding that the conditions suggested by the Entente powers were such that the Entente itself considered a discussion of these conditions impossible given the then-current state of the war. The detail with which the Entente had developed its program of conquest and annihilation and rejected peace discussions with the Central Powers was clearly more valuable to him than the brevity with which the Central Powers had declared their willingness to discuss a peace that would only secure the honor, existence, and freedom of development of their peoples. The manifestation of such remarkable bias was a confirmation of all the reservations that had previously been voiced against Wilsonian peace mediation and, at the same time, a warning for the future, which unfortunately was not sufficiently heeded at the decisive moment.

Following this brief introduction—which was directly important only for the question of peace negotiations—Wilson elaborated extensively on his ideas about the future coexistence of nations. Peace must be followed by a reorganization of the international community, in the construction of which the United States must participate under all circumstances. The foundation for this reconstruction would be laid by the peace agreement, which was to bring an end to the world war. The main question is: Is the current war a fight for a just and secure peace, or merely for a new balance of power? What is needed is not balance, but a community of power, not organized rivalry,

but an organized common peace. It must be a peace without victory. A victorious peace would be experienced by the defeated as humiliation, as harshness, as an unbearable sacrifice, and it would leave behind a sting, a thirst for revenge, and bitter memories, on which the edifice of peace would rest as if on shifting sand. Only a peace among equals promises lastingness. The equality of nations must be an equality of rights, without distinction between great and small. Law must be founded on common strength, not on individual nations. "Humanity now looks for the freedom of life, not the balance of power." In addition to the equality of organized peoples, a lasting peace requires that governments derive their power from the consent of the governed. He believes, for example, that it is For example, it was taken for granted that statesmen everywhere agreed on the creation of a united, independent, and self-sufficient Poland. Furthermore, as far as possible, every major nation should be assured of direct access to the maritime highways, if not by ceding territory, then by neutralizing access routes. The sea routes themselves must also be free, both by law and in practice. "Freedom of the seas is a sine qua non for peace, equality, and cooperation." Wilson then went on to speak of the necessity of arms limitations on land and sea. The question of armaments, he argued, is most directly and profoundly linked to the future destiny of nations and humanity.

These were ideas of grand conception and lofty ideals. But their realization depended, as Wilson himself explained, on the solution of the immediate practical question of ending the World War. And on this point, Wilson's message achieved less than nothing; for it only revealed his complete lack of understanding of our and our allies' rights and needs, and of the monstrous nature of the Entente's demands, which, by their own admission, could not be achieved through a peace without victory, but only through the complete defeat of the Central Powers.

However, at the very last moment, it seemed as if Mr Wilson wanted and could find a way out.

On Sunday, January 28, 1917, the Chancellor summoned me to his office around 10 o'clock in the evening. A telegram had arrived from Count Bernstorff, which, as I recall, contained the following: Colonel House informed him, on behalf of President Wilson, that the President, despite the Entente's rejection, had not given up hope of bringing about peace and was prepared to resume his efforts in that direction. These efforts would be made considerably easier for him if we were prepared to communicate our peace terms to him. Count Bernstorff requested, under these circumstances, that he be allowed to provisionally retain the note already sent to him for delivery on January 31, containing the announcement of unrestricted submarine warfare, and recommended that President Wilson's request for communication of the peace terms be complied with.

The Chancellor, who once again saw the glimmer of hope that war with America could be avoided and perhaps even peace achieved, was in a state of excitement I had never seen before. He was determined to communicate to Wilson, through Bernstorff, the broad outlines of the peace conditions we intended to present as our proposal in the event of the peace negotiations we had proposed coming to fruition. Bernstorff's request to retain the U-boat note presented a difficulty; for the U-boats had long since departed for their stations, some of which were located far to the west of Ireland, and were probably impossible to reach.

The Chancellor decided to travel to the Great Headquarters that same evening with State Secretary Zimmermann. A reply telegram to Count Bernstorff was agreed upon there. It stated that we most joyfully welcomed the President's new initiative and authorized the Ambassador to inform the President, for his personal information, of the basic features of our peace conditions, as envisaged in our peace proposal of December 12, 1916. This should take place simultaneously with the delivery of the U-boat note. Withholding the latter was impossible, since the boats carrying the orders were already at their stations and, for the most part, unreachable for a counter-order. We were, however, prepared to cease the new U-boat war immediately if the President's efforts had succeeded in securing a promising basis for peace negotiations.

The conditions communicated to President Wilson, which we intended to make the basis of peace negotiations, were the following:

- Restitution of the French-occupied part of Upper Alsace.
- Gaining a border that strategically and economically secures Germany and Poland against Russia.
- Colonial restitution in the form of an agreement that secures colonial possessions for Germany commensurate with its population and the importance of its economic interests.
- Return of the French territories occupied by Germany subject to strategic and economic border adjustments and financial compensation.
- Restoration of Belgium under certain guarantees for the security of Germany, which would be determined through negotiations with the Belgian government.
- Economic and financial compensation based on the exchange of territories conquered by both sides and to be restored in the peace agreement.
- Compensation for German companies and private individuals damaged by the war.
- Renunciation of all economic agreements and measures which would constitute an obstacle to normal trade and commerce after the conclusion of peace, by concluding appropriate trade agreements.
- Ensuring freedom of the seas.

The German government further declared its readiness to participate, on the basis of President Wilson's Senate message, in the international conference he sought after the end of the war.

The telegram to Count Bernstorff was communicated to the members of the Reichstag's Main Committee in a secret session on January 31, 1917, immediately after the U-boat note had been handed over to Mr. Gerard. Even the majority Social Democrats recognized it as an attempt to force the United States out of the war and keep the path to peace open. The basic principles of our peace program gave rise to criticism due to their modesty. The spokespersons of the two conservative parties, the National Liberals and the Center Party, and, if I remember correctly, also the Free Democrats, expressed the wish that the Chancellor, if peace negotiations should still take place, would not consider himself bound by this program.

There were no peace negotiations, but immediately after the note was presented, diplomatic relations between the United States and the German Reich were severed, and a few weeks later, war was declared.

I have endeavored in the foregoing to unravel and clarify the intricate connections between the peace efforts, both those of the Reich government and those of Wilson, and the submarine war. To the best of my knowledge and belief, I have described the events as I saw them unfolding. I am aware that others, including those who were personally involved in those tragic developments, do not agree with my interpretation of the events in all respects, and may even differ from them on essential points. This applies especially to Count Bernstorff, who, as ambassador to the United States, experienced both the peace efforts and the developments that led to war with America from his post across the Atlantic Ocean.

Count Bernstorff was then, and probably still is, not only convinced that President Wilson genuinely wanted peace at that time, but also that he confronted both warring parties without prejudice and was prepared to implement a peace acceptable and tolerable to us. He was convinced that President Wilson's peace efforts would have been successful if we, who had continually urged the President to mediate peace, had not, at the very moment that success was ripe, slapped the President in the face with unrestricted submarine warfare, destroyed any possibility of peace, and forced America into war against us.

I myself fought to the last possible moment to postpone the decision to initiate unrestricted submarine warfare until the impact of our peace move, like President Wilson's, could be fully assessed. Therefore, when I oppose Count Bernstorff's opinion, I am certainly not pleading on my own behalf, but solely in the interest of enlightenment and historical truth.

I do not want to deny President Wilson's honest desire to bring about what he considered a just peace. But I cannot admit that he showed any particular zeal in bringing about peace, nor that, despite his subjective desire for justice, he objectively showed the same degree of understanding and goodwill towards the two warring groups.

At the beginning of May 1916, according to Ambassador Gerard's own report, Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg expressed to him the hope that President Wilson would now be august enough to take up the cause of peace. At that time, the presidential election was still half a year away; therefore, the impending presidential election could not yet be a serious obstacle to peace action. But the President did nothing for peace. He accepted our concession to end unrestricted submarine warfare and did not even attempt any serious step to persuade England to return to the principles of international law and the law of naval warfare. German policy in this regard was certainly not without its faults. President Wilson might have acted differently if the reduction of submarine warfare to the forms of cruiser warfare had not taken place until May 1916, after the critical situation created by the sinking of the Lusitania had been made hopelessly more difficult by the

torpedoing of the *Arabian* and finally the *Sussex* — to name only the most important cases — but had taken place already after my suggestion, which was unfortunately not followed up in July-August 1915, in response to the President's offer to cooperate with him in restoring freedom of the seas during the war, against whomever it might be. But be that as it may, the fact remains that President Wilson, in response to the German suggestion made at the beginning of May 1916 to take up the cause of peace, did nothing for many months, not even giving a promise that he would do something, and that he finally took a step toward peace only after Germany and its allies had made the peace proposal of December 12, 1916.

That President Wilson, in his language, outlook on life, and worldview, belongs to the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere and, consequently, is inwardly closer to our enemies than to us, is not a reproach against Mr. Wilson, but for us it was a fact that we could not ignore with impunity. That Mr. Wilson could not objectively measure up to the same yardstick became clear soon after the outbreak of war in the first exchange of dispatches between the Kaiser and the President of the United States. Since the negotiations with the President in October-November 1918 on bringing about an armistice and initiating peace negotiations, it should have become clear even to Wilson's greatest German admirer that this man is incapable of freeing himself from prejudice and bias against us. What we could expect from Mr. Wilson in terms of just appreciation of our national honor and vital needs was already overwhelmingly expressed in his message to the Senate of January 22, 1917. In this message, he summarily dismissed our expression of readiness for a peace that would realize our defensive aim and secure the honor, existence, and freedom of development of our peoples and those of our allies, claiming that, in response to his suggestion of peace, we had "simply" declared our willingness to meet with our adversaries in conference, while he described the "much more elaborate" reply of our adversaries, which demanded nothing less than the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary and Turkey and the mutilation of Germany, as a step that had brought the final discussion of peace "so much nearer"!

If, despite this unambiguity, Count Bernstorff was of the opinion in the last week of January 1917, and apparently still is of the opinion today, that Wilson was then about to work for a peace acceptable and tolerable to us, and to work for it successfully, this can only be explained by the lasting effect of suggestions to which he had been exposed for two years without the counterweight of even a reasonably sufficient connection with his homeland. Correspondence and any kind of personal contact between Berlin and the German Embassy in Washington was completely cut off. Soon after the outbreak of war, the United States government had made it impossible for us to use our own American wireless stations for any kind of coded telegrams, while the British cables remained unrestrictedly available to our enemies. The possibility of sending coded telegrams to our ambassador through the American Embassy in Berlin and the American government in Washington was granted only within the narrowest of limits. Thus, it is ultimately understandable that our representation across the Great Water lost contact with the German people struggling for their existence, and lost a sense of proportion for what was necessary and tolerable for us.

In any case, by mid-January 1917, it was clear to us at home that both the German and the American peace initiatives had failed due to our enemies' relentless will to conquer and destroy. For the more spirited, the speeches with which the enemy statesmen rejected our peace proposal with ridicule and scorn in the days immediately following December 12, 1916, were enough to confirm this conviction, as was the reply note that the Entente powers had handed us on December 31, 1916. For the more cautious, any attempt at peace was ended by the monstrous reply that Mr. Briand, on behalf of the Entente governments, delivered to the American ambassador in Paris on January 10, 1917, in response to President Wilson's peace initiative. President Wilson's Senate message of January 22, 1917, could not be interpreted on this side of the Atlantic as a continuation of the peace efforts, but merely as President Wilson's taking sides in favor of our enemies, explainable only by incurable prejudice. No one in our leading circles, including myself, who had opposed the immediate initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare up to and beyond the decision, could still believe after these events that on the other side of the Atlantic the peace effort was still considered unfinished and that its continuation was even being considered.

Only the telegram from Count Bernstorff, which arrived here on the evening of January 28, showed that President Wilson intended to take another step towards peace. In response to this telegram, as far as I can judge, the German side did everything possible under the circumstances to give President Wilson a clear field for this new attempt. However, the President preferred, despite the communication of the conditions we had worked out as the basis for the first peace discussion and despite our willingness to cease unrestricted submarine warfare as soon as he had succeeded in securing promising grounds for peace negotiations, to abruptly cut off any further negotiations and to break off diplomatic relations with us without any further justification.

It may seem a moot question whether President Wilson, if the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare had not been made in those critical days, would have succeeded in bringing about peace, or whether at least the United States would have stayed away from the war in that event. But these questions have so deeply stirred our entire people that I feel compelled to say a word about this as well.

I consider it impossible that the new peace action envisaged by Wilson towards the end of January 1917 could have led to a peace acceptable to us. The conditions set by the Entente, the seriousness of which we cannot doubt, were such that only a completely broken Germany could accept them. Who in Germany at that time would have dared to give up Alsace-Lorraine with further parts of the left bank of the Rhine and our eastern marches, to burden the German people with a huge war reparation, to place us under the guardianship of the Entente for the future, and to abandon our allies to the most disgraceful destruction? Even a status quo peace could have been achieved only with the most bitter internal struggles; it would have been achieved, but anything beyond that was simply impossible. Only if President Wilson had been prepared to use the full weight of American power to pressure the Entente powers to force them to completely change their minds, and only if he had found the support of the American people and their representatives in such an approach, would there have been any prospect of peace. But Wilson, who in his Senate message of January

22, 1917, treated the Entente's outrageous war aims as debatable, was clearly unwilling to do this, nor were the people and Congress of the United States. The likelihood of American pressure on us and our allies was much greater.

This probability was all the more likely since the peace note presented by the American government in Berlin on December 21, 1916, contained the passage that the interests of the United States had been "seriously affected" by the war and that the Union's interest in a speedy end to the war arose from the fact that "it would be manifestly compelled to make provisions for the best possible protection of its interests if the war were to continue." This barely veiled threat became even more explicit. In an interview which Secretary of State Lansing gave shortly afterward to members of the American press, he said, with unequivocal reference to Germany, that America was close to war.

On the one hand, it is virtually impossible that President Wilson would have brought peace to the world, even if we hadn't resorted to unrestricted submarine warfare back then. On the other hand, it is not entirely impossible that the very continuation of Wilson's peace program would have led to the war between America and Germany, which has now resulted from the submarine war.

I regret that the situation, which demanded clarification in January 1917, will probably never be clarified beyond all doubt due to the hasty initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare. For me, having experienced that critical period, it is unshakably clear: Wilson's historic mission to help the world achieve peace among equals failed because of his lack of understanding of our vital rights and necessities. It failed not only in the dark weeks of October and November 1918, but already at the turn of the years 1916 and 1917.

These statements were written and printed before the announcement of the peace terms reached by the powers allied against us with Wilson's assistance. These terms are a confirmation of the judgment expressed above.

Footnotes:

[4]The American government later repeatedly claimed that a ban on arms exports to belligerents would be an unneutral act, since, under the circumstances, arms deliveries would only benefit the Entente, and thus a ban would only harm the Entente. The German government, on the other hand, was able to justify its position that tolerating arms exports was unneutral behavior precisely because they exclusively benefited the Entente by citing President Wilson, who in February 1914, as the justification for banning arms exports to the two warring parties in Mexico, had declared: "Since Carranza has no ports, while Huerta has ports for importing arms, it is our duty as a nation to treat both on equal terms if we wish to observe the true spirit of neutrality and not a mere paper neutrality."

[5]Printed in bold in the official original.

Bethmann

Reflections on the World War, Volume II: During the War, by Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg

U-boat warfare (1915–1917)

The most economical use of U-boats while preventing a break with America was the signature of the U-boat war of 1915 and 1916. The contrast between the two goals stamped the company with the stamp of half-measure from the outset. In general, during these phases, it was adhered to only attacking enemy ships and sparing neutral ones. But even such a submarine war could not be effectively waged without at the same time threatening the neutrals both in their relatives on board enemy ships and, since confusion was unavoidable in the nature of submarine combat, in their own merchant shipping.

Thus, the danger of entanglements with America could not be completely eliminated, even with limited submarine warfare. The sinkings of the *Lusitania*, the *Arabic* and the *Sussex* were the climaxes of the crisis in which we were constantly floating. A policy of continued manoeuvring towards America was the necessary consequence. All the disadvantages of such a policy had to be accepted. Even if no existing code of international law suited submarine warfare, our claims to neutral tolerance were fully justified.

From the point of view of international law, the submarine war was reprisal against England's hunger blockade, which was contrary to international law. If America put up with any restriction of its legitimate intercourse with Germany from England, then its revolt against similar German interventions was utterly impartial. We have constantly emphasized this principle. To carry it out to the last consequences, as the U-boat supporters wanted, meant war with America. For it was not legal principles that mattered, but America's actual stance.

The assumption held in some circles in Germany, and especially within the Navy, that President Wilson's objection to the U-boat War of February 1915 and later the demands of his *Sussex* note were nothing but bluff, was supported only by the initial aversion of the American people to active participation in the war. All other signs subjectively and objectively showed the opposite.

The unfriendly reception of our protest against our enemies' conduct of war in violation of international law right at the beginning of the war set the tone. The unlimited arms and ammunition deliveries were, quite independently of their permissibility under international law, undisguised material partisanship for the Entente. They meant more than an initial vacillation in parts of public opinion. An outright victory for Germany would be contrary to America's economic and political interests.

It was only from facts, none of which justified a favorable prognosis, but all of which were natural heavyweights in the scales of the Entente, that German policy drew its conclusions when it took

President Wilson's resistance to any submarine warfare that would prevent American freedom of movement at sea bitterly seriously.

The situation was complicated by the invitation to Germany, expressed in President Wilson's note of 23 July 1915, to restore the freedom of the seas hand in hand with America during the war. How was that to be understood? It had been England, after all, that had first threatened this freedom, nay, had as good as abolished it for intercourse with Germany. But America had not intervened against its intrusions into international law, or at least not energetically.

An attempt made in February 1915 to make a breach in the British hunger blockade was immediately abandoned by the American government when England objected. To what extent should German cooperation now be necessary or even suitable in order to achieve the goal? English submissiveness in the face of combined American-German pressure, England's renunciation of its strongest weapon, our barrier, could only be thought of if American neutrality showed itself in a form that constantly kept the possibility of American unfriendliness before England's eyes.

Were the American ammunition deliveries apt to this, or was it the unfriendly tone in which America spoke to us, while the notes sent to London were distinguished by perfect courtesy? Even this invitation of July 23, 1915, was wrapped up in the undisguised threat that America would repay us by breaking off relations for any atrophy of the free movement of her citizens, which she had quietly put up with from England.

How justified my skepticism was under such circumstances has been proven by the time that followed. It is true that the Arabic and the Sussexes have further deteriorated our relations with America. But in both cases the disaster was not as great as in the case of the Lusitania, and a few months after the Lusitania it happened that the President called on us to cooperate with him.

The decisive point lay elsewhere. In our Sussex note of 4 May 1916, in accordance with the American demand, we traced submarine warfare back to the forms of cruiser warfare. For our part, we removed every obstacle to American action to restore the freedom of the seas. We also expressed this explicitly in our note.

President Wilson, however, through his confidant, the Supreme House, sent word to Count Bernstorff that he had no power to compel England to comply with the norms of international law, since public opinion in his country would not tolerate any disturbance of the so close trade relations with the Entente.

That was the decisive moment. The commercial and financial ties to the Entente may have been even stronger in 1916 than a year earlier. Based on decades-old relations, it was a stable factor in the relationship between the two Anglo-Saxon nations. England woe to do, banned American business. This was a political guiding principle that even an ideal will could not have overturned.

The conclusion of the U-boat war of 1915 and 1916 can be summarized in two moments. It has been possible to prevent an open break with America in the event of weakened submarine warfare.

But that an unrestricted submarine war would bring about the break had become undeniable. The U-boat incidents had stiffened the mutual relations alarmingly.

On the other hand, it was proven that, if at all, only an unrestricted U-boat war, which also covered neutral shipping, could have a resounding effect. Limited to enemy shipping, it inflicted severe damage on the enemy, but did not break their will to war.

The experience gained with the possibilities of action of the U-boat force in the position of the Admiral Staff has clearly expressed itself. In 1915, according to his instructions, U-boat warfare was to be waged by refraining from violence against neutral ships. Admiral von Tirpitz and the Chief of the Admiral's Staff, when asked by the Emperor to make a statement, jointly expressed the conviction that six weeks after the beginning of such a restricted U-boat trade war, England would give in. However, the prospect of this success was linked to the clause "that it would be possible to use all means of power that could be used for this warfare energetically from the beginning." That was a safety valve for all eventualities. But once one agreed to guarantee such a great success within a period measured by weeks in the calendar, then the addition was understandable. The decisive factor remained that the navy expected the success of the British concession within the foreseeable future from a U-boat war that was not extended to the neutrals like the one of 1917.

In 1916, the navy no longer had this expectation. Now the Admiral Staff held out the prospect that, according to the experience gained in the meantime, the English resistance would be broken in six months at the most, if submarine warfare would be restarted under suitable weather conditions with the means at its disposal and without restrictions which would paralyze its effectiveness from the outset. That was the U-boat war, which basically no longer spared the neutrals. From then on, it was the Navy's ambition to make it possible.

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In the winter of 1914-15, the Supreme Army Command took the view that America's entry into the war must be prevented as long as England was not defeated or our situation was otherwise secured. The expectation, however, that the submarine war would take effect before America would make itself felt militarily in the event of a break, and the prospect of thus making the valuable part of the German Wehrmacht established in the Navy usable for the war on land, were factors which determined the connection of the Army Command to the statements of the Admiralty Staff.

Even during the summer of 1915, General von Falkenhayn maintained the view that we could no longer bear the burden of American access to our enemies, and he strongly supported me in obtaining orders to the Navy for the most scrupulous protection not only of neutral ships, but also of large enemy passenger steamers.

In 1916, the Supreme Army Command fundamentally changed its position. It declared that, in the general military-political situation in Germany, the renunciation of unrestricted submarine warfare, which, according to the sole judgment of the Navy, would cause England to give in within 1916, was no longer militarily justifiable. She assessed the break with America as a serious, but only possible disadvantage.

Thus, since 1916, the army command and the navy were unanimously convinced advocates of unrestricted submarine warfare.

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Thus, since 1916, the army command and the navy were unanimously convinced advocates of unrestricted submarine warfare.

In the winter of 1914-15, I do not deny that the confidence of the Navy did not fail to impress me. I did not oppose the demands of the Admiral's Staff, which were already very urgent at that time, with the utmost severity. On the other hand, I have not been able to draw the conclusion from the experience of 1915 that unrestricted submarine warfare could and must begin in 1916.

We had started the U-boat war of February 1915 with 21 U-boats. According to the information given to me personally by the Chief of the Admiralty Staff, the completely unrestricted submarine warfare of 1916 was to be conducted according to the following general plan.

On March 1 we had 35 large U-boats and second-class U-boats, which could be used just like the large ones, ready for use. Of these, 17 boats were to be made available for four stations near England, while the remaining 18 were to be distributed to Flanders, the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean.

For the permanent occupation of the four stations, 12 boats were declared necessary, so that there would have been a surplus of 5 boats. (In later practice, the need for boats for each station turned out to be much higher.) The boats destined for the four English stations were to stay an average of 25 days away from their home port. They stayed at the most remote stations for about 10 to 11 days.

On average, these boats carried nine torpedoes. It was assumed that 36 torpedoes could be fired by them every 14 days and, in small numbers, 25 ships with an average weight of 4000 tons could be sunk. This resulted in a monthly output of 200,000 tonnes. In addition, there were the sinkings in the canal, in the Mediterranean Sea and through mining activity.

The increase in large boats was to amount to a total of 44 with monthly fluctuations until the end of September. In addition, 25 mine boats with torpedo equipment were to arrive in the same time. — These are the information given to me by Admiral von Holtzendorff.

I have not been able to convince myself that this power will be sufficient to bring about the success promised by the Navy. To what extent and within what period of time traffic restrictions and ship losses would affect England's war readiness and will to war was in itself a probability calculation with uncertain factors.

The uncertainty of the bill grew the less complete the blockade was. All even somewhat extensive breaches of the barrier were bound to overturn any calculation, the sole basis of which was precisely the barrier.

In spite of the astonishing achievements of our U-boats, it seemed to me completely impossible that they would be numerous enough to prevent such breakthroughs. This coincided with the Navy's bill for me.

Moreover, it was not sufficiently taken into account that the expected sinkings of ships were initially compensated for to a considerable extent by the increase which the enemy could procure from the construction of new ships and from the recourse to the German commercial tonnage in the neutral ports.

The new building could be estimated at 650,000 tons for 1915, and the commercial tonnage exposed to enemy access at over 11/2 million.

Under these circumstances, I am convinced that unrestricted submarine warfare in 1916 would have been a gamble. We exchanged an opportunity that was not only uncertain, but not perceptible on a sober basis for a certain break with America. Its consequences were not uncertain. Neither morally nor materially. Today, there is no need to discuss the consequences at length.

On March 4, the Emperor made the fundamental decision in Charleville. Against the vote of the Supreme Army Command and the Admiralty Staff, His Majesty agreed with the position I had represented. Materially, however, the emperor's decision was certain.

His conviction that the success promised by the Navy could not be achieved with our naval forces at that time was the basis of the decision that determined our answer to the American Suffernote at the end of April.

At that time, too, the assertion, so busily fructified throughout the war, was brought out that by closing the Emperor I had prevented His Majesty from informing himself of the real situation. But it was precisely on this occasion that the insinuation was particularly foolish.

His Majesty was informed most precisely about the overall military situation by the daily lectures of the Supreme Army Command, and the Emperor placed unconditional confidence in General von Falkenhayn, who wanted unrestricted submarine warfare.

Everything that concerned the navy was particularly close to His Majesty's heart. The emperor knew very well what public opinion wanted. His Majesty was a very attentive newspaper reader, and the press was filled with submarine drifts.

However, the personal influence of Admiral von Tirpitz had declined. The admiral himself talks about it in detail in his "Memoirs". But it is strangely touching that the writer of the "War Letters" complains about the lack of trust of his imperial master, whom he himself criticizes so sharply in these war letters.

The questions of submarine warfare were so technically complicated, so materially so serious, that they could not withstand any pressure from public opinion. Provoked the case did not obstruct. The idea of submarine warfare was sensationally thrown into the world by the interview which Admiral von Tirpitz gave to an American correspondent as early as December 1914. He gave it without my knowledge. Only after the wording of the interview had crossed the German border, i.e. its publication abroad was certain, was the approval of the Foreign Office sought for its publication in the German press.

This was the first and decisive step. Publicly, the enemies were advised to prepare for a U-boat blockade, and the German people were publicly warned of the possession of an infallible means of war. From now on, submarine warfare could no longer be torn from the heart of the nation.

On the enormous authority that Admiral von Tirpitz widely enjoyed, the honest belief was based in the broadest strata that U-boat warfare, if used immediately and correctly, would guarantee us quick victory and peace. The consequences were inevitable. The voice of the public thus called upon could never be silenced again.

I have continued to try to rein in the press propagating unrestricted submarine warfare. But what could censorship bans do against the power of a conviction that felt itself sedated by the naval verdict, which was considered infallible! Yes, all attempts to contain the agitation only increased its intensity. On underground paths, almost fairytale-like naval judgments, supposedly based on naval authorities and considered infallible, were felt to be covered. Yes, submarine numbers were disseminated among the people, without any effective counter-work being possible through the communication of the true digits.

For I could not explain to the ears of the enemy that I rejected unrestricted submarine warfare only because, in my opinion, our submarine strength was not sufficient. Over time, demagogic methods did not remain far away. Too weak to withstand the pressure of war psychosis, political ignorance and malice combined to form the useless accusation that I was preventing unrestricted submarine warfare only because I wanted to spare England out of Anglophilia or even out of dishonest motives.

The naval offices were in a peculiar position. Convinced of the absolute suitability of unrestricted submarine warfare and for this reason alone in rigid opposition to the political leadership, they were at least not unwilling to see the machinations of the press.

The need to make our sufficient U-boat strength credible to the people was mixed with the hope of enforcing unrestricted U-boat warfare with the support of the public. Wherever the navy tried to counter the machinations of the press, for example, it only met with an understanding augur's smile. Even she could not pour pure wine about the extent of our means of power. Even in the Bundesrat at the beginning of March 1916, a strange process took place. The overview given by a representative of the Reichsmarineamt about our U-boat inventory was formulated in such a way that it led to false and exaggerated conclusions, which various members of the Bundesrat actually drew and passed on to their governments.

It took my inducement to make the necessary correction. This process was immediately followed by a far-reaching measure in its consequences.

While press control for the Land Army was not exercised by the Minister of War, but by the Chief of the General Staff, for the fleet it was not in the hands of the Admiral Staff, but of the Reich Naval Office. Less for the sake of conformity than because the authority responsible for operations was naturally also the one responsible for press control, I obtained from the Kaiser at the beginning of March 1916 that it was transferred to the Chief of the Admiral's Staff.

At the same time, preventive censorship of U-boat articles was ordered with the proviso that U-boat warfare was to be treated in the press in the same way as operations of the land army. In this way I hoped to be able to stop the press agitation more effectively than before, which no longer held back even with personal insults of the Emperor. The answer to the Cabinet letter of March 5, 1916, which made this order, was the resignation of Herr von Tirpitz.

Of the political parties, the right-wing parties had also sought to win over the public mood for unrestricted submarine warfare by means of parliamentary initiatives, even beyond the activities of their press. They used the Prussian House of Representatives for this purpose.

Under scrupulous secrecy from the Reich leadership and completely unexpectedly, they obtained a resolution in the budget commission on February 12, 1916, which declared it harmful in the interest of the country "if the attitude of the Reich leadership towards America resulted in the consequence of a restriction in our freedom to take up unrestricted submarine warfare against England at the appropriate time."

The decision was immediately made public, and even before the Reich leadership could comment on it. Thus, in the middle of the war, parties which behaved and were allowed to act as the natural parliamentary exponents of our Armed Forces on water and land invoked the leading federal state against the Reich leadership, and at the same time treated the break with America in the spirit of

an overestimation of itself, which completely discouraged the public, which was already passionately excited by the American ammunition deliveries, from any realpolitik judgment.

The decisions of 1916 were not influenced by the whipping up of public opinion. In the Reichstag, too, I succeeded in keeping the U-boat question at least out of the plenary session and transferring it to the commission. There I was able to explain without reservation the reasons which in reality prevented me from unrestricted submarine warfare.

Nevertheless, the passionate engagement of public opinion has remained fundamental. It became a strong psychological factor in a calculation that could only be decided in very cold blood and only in the most sober consideration of all political and military factors.

Looking back at the years 1915 and 1916, the accusation will stick that we plunged into the entanglements of U-boat warfare before we were strong enough to conduct it promisingly. It is less understandable that even after the disastrous end of the war, the thesis is still defended that we would have won if we had started unrestricted submarine warfare as early as 1916 or even 1915.

Since the prerequisites for a favorable success with regard to our own U-boat power and with regard to England's ability to provide provisions were indisputably never as favorable as in 1917, the accusation of negligence can essentially only be based on the assertion that England, at any rate in 1915, but also in 1916, did not have sufficient means of defence. That is why our small U-boat power would have been sufficient in those years.

After all, everything can be proven with such an assertion. The antidotes have undeniably grown over time. In general, however, all defensive measures which are not fundamentally beyond the realm of all practical possibilities tend to be perfected with the intensity of the attacks.

The idea that an England faced with the danger of losing the war would not have been able to defend itself in 1916 in the same way as in 1917 underestimates British tenacity and British naval warfare.

Closer than the hypothesis of England being unable to defend itself is the assumption that 25 or so U-boats could not possibly have achieved the success in 1915 and 1916 that was denied in 1917 and 1918 by twice or three times as many.

The change in the Supreme Army Command in August 1916 has become decisive for the question of U-boat warfare.

Initially, Romania's entry into the war dominated the situation. Our overall situation was so threatened that, at least for the time being, it was impossible to think of taking on a new risk. If our forces were tied up by the entry of the Rumanian front, if we could not stand up militarily even to neutrals who, under the pressure of Britain and America, were to adopt a hostile attitude, then all the reasons which had determined me in the spring against unrestricted submarine warfare now weighed twice as heavily.

At the request of the Admiral Staff, the submarine question was discussed in detail between the political and military authorities in Pleß on 31 August. The Supreme Army Command declared that, in view of the military situation on land, it did not yet consider the time had come for unrestricted submarine warfare.

While the positive decision was thus postponed, the enormous influence which the authority of the new Supreme Army Command must one day have was very soon felt.

Of the political parties, the Centre, although such an influential and close organ as the Kölner Volkszeitung energetically preached submarine warfare, had nevertheless avoided any commitment on its part. There was no Reichstag majority for unrestricted submarine warfare.

Now the centre has broken away from its old clever tradition of a free hand.

In a diplomatic version it approved in advance by resolution of October 7, 1916, unrestricted submarine warfare as soon as Hindenburg and Ludendorff would demand it. The Reich Chancellor was left with full responsibility, but he was clearly told that in the event of differences with the Supreme Army Command, he would not be able to rely on the Centre.

This finally determined the parliamentary situation. Every vote of the Supreme Army Command for unrestricted submarine warfare had a large and firm Reichstag majority behind it. On the question of submarine warfare, the parliament had also transferred political power to military power.

On the basis of the stabilized balance of power, the decision for unrestricted submarine warfare was made.

On December 12, we had made our peace offer to the Entente. As soon as his rejection was determined, the Supreme Army Command began to press for the beginning of unrestricted submarine warfare. Immediately after Lloyd George's dismissive speech of December 19 became known, the Foreign Office received a telegram from General Ludendorff, in which, on the basis of personal impressions on the Western Front, he expressed the conviction that U-boat warfare must now begin with all its severity.

A reference from the Foreign Office to the serious misgivings was replied to the effect that the General did not want to press for unlimited submarine warfare before the completion of our peace action, but was immediately followed by the very precise declaration that without ruthless submarine warfare we would lose the campaign. At the end of January, the time had come. The Field Marshal could no longer bear responsibility for the course of the campaign if the government did not respond to this.

Thus, as early as December 22, the leadership of the army openly threatened to raise the cabinet question.

On the following day, December 23, I received a telegram signed by the Field Marshal himself. It said: "The Entente continues the war by all means. There is no doubt about that, after we have received such a sharp rejection in all parliaments. Even Wilson's efforts cannot change this, if our opponents do not want to prove themselves wrong. I consider Wilson's offer to be brought about by England. In my opinion, we cannot go into this now for national reasons in view of our strong military position. It would therefore be a serious and militarily unjustifiable omission if we wanted to be held up in any way."

With strong words, the telegram pointed to the mood in the army, which expected the ruthless use of all forces. My unfavorable answer was followed on December 26 by a telegram from the Field Marshal, also brusque in tone, in which he reads:

"In my telegram I had emphasized the necessity of prompt energetic action at sea, since I see in it the only means of bringing the war to a speedy end. Your Excellency believe that you cannot yet enter this path. But our military situation does not allow any negotiations to postpone military measures recognized as correct and thus paralyze the energy of warfare."

The Field Marshal used his full sense of responsibility for this demand. Against the political responsibility of the Reich Chancellor, which he does not deny, he placed the responsibility of the Supreme Army Command. The possibilities of political negotiations were countered by the conditional necessity of military measures and — from the point of view of the Supreme Army Command — were absolutely superordinate.

In the first days of January, I was called to the Grand Headquarters. When I arrived in Pleß on the morning of the 9th, the decision had de facto already been made. The Supreme Army Command and the Admiral Staff, for their part, were determined to make submarine warfare. The Emperor sided with them.

Towards the spring and summer of 1916, when I had prevented U-boat warfare, the situation had changed fundamentally. At that time I had been able to prevail with my opinion, because the authority of General von Falkenhayn was not great enough to push through a measure in view of the obviously insufficient number of U-boats, which was popular in the circles influenced by the Conservatives, the National Liberals, the All-Germans and the Navy, but which was still viewed skeptically by the majority of the Reichstag.

Now the number of U-boats had grown so strongly that with the low world harvest of the year 1916 a success of the U-boat war could be made more plausible. The decisive factor was that Field Marshal Hindenburg and General Ludendorff were now at the head of the Supreme Army

Command. Without limits, the confidence which these generals enjoyed among the whole people, from the lowest to the highest, was based on the fact that they had repeatedly been saviours of the fatherland.

The majority of the Reichstag had made it clear that it would regard Hindenburg's vote as decisive. If these two generals demanded U-boat warfare as a necessary means of war, thereby ratifying the attacks of the Navy, and declaring themselves strong enough to bear all the consequences of U-boat warfare, including the war with America, until the success guaranteed by the Navy had occurred, then it would have to be possible to support a contradiction on a very clear and resounding ground, in order to prevail.

The admiral staff had justified the predicted success with detailed statistical calculations by men, which in some circles were considered economic authorities. Of course, these calculations were not conclusive. But neither could the failure of the U-boat war be statistically proven. Both the leadership and the omission of U-boat warfare remained an experiment.

If it was asserted by the Supreme Army Command with all the emphatic emphasis that was due to its voice, that a successful end of the war would unconditionally demand submarine warfare, but would also be guaranteed by the assurances of the Admiralty Staff, which it accepted, then I had to be able to present a tangible indication of the prospect of bringing the war to an end in a form acceptable to Germany even without submarine warfare.

Vague and unsubstantiated ideas were bound to be broken by the conviction, supported by the entire authority of the Supreme Army Command, that the overall military situation imperatively demanded submarine warfare, and that the postponement of submarine warfare was tantamount to renouncing it.

Even this latter deduction could no longer be rejected outright at the beginning of 1917. It had been unstable in the spring and summer of 1916. In 1916 we did not have anywhere near the necessary U-boats, we were militarily in no way able to cope with the consequences of the U-boat war. At that time, America's entry into the war would have hit us at a moment when the overall military situation was most severely burdened by the failure of the attack on Verdun and the threat to the eastern and south-eastern fronts by Rumania's attitude.

In 1917, however, thanks to the leadership of the Supreme Army Command and the bravery of the troops, the situation was quite different. Rumania was finished, and in the west an infinitely greater security had been created, especially through the expansion of rear positions, through the firm foundation of the ammunition replacement.

Nevertheless, time was running against us. Even the most resolute will to win and the firmest confidence in victory could not get rid of the brutal fact that with the continued growth of the enemy's superiority, our replacement of men decreased and became worse under the effects of the blockade. A U-boat war postponed to 1918 would no longer have had the time ahead of it when it could have had an effect even with an optimistic view. And apodictically, the admiral staff

maintained that it could no longer vouch for success if submarine warfare began later than February 1. It was precisely through the overseas transports due in February that England would be able to supply herself again in such a way that a later blockade would no longer be of any effect. That was an irrefutable assumption.

So everything was set up for our foreign policy situation. I had to take the Entente's response to our peace offer as a decisive refusal. The rejection seemed so categorical to me that I did not hope for an envelope from President Wilson's peace note of December 21.

Admittedly, I did not go as far as the Supreme Army Command in my skepticism about the president. The latter knew that the American appeal for peace of December 21 corresponded to suggestions that we ourselves had given. But she saw behind it English machinations, by no means aimed at peace, in which our strong military position forbade us to be involved.

However, all Wilson's previous conduct towards us, his position in the various phases of submarine warfare, made me despair that even if he wanted to, he would have the power to force the Entente to a peace acceptable to us. If I could not see an end to the war there, then only speculation on the Russian Revolution remained. It had been predicted for a long time, and the signs that it would come were in the air, so to speak. However, I did not dispose of a science that was more than conjecture.

General Ludendorff's subsequent hint that he would have voted quite differently on January 9 if I had held out the prospect of a possible change in our political situation through the collapse of one of our enemies, such as we later experienced in Russia, imposes on me a gift of prophethood not given to men. The eventuality of the Russian revolution was as well known to the general as it was to me, and its entry into time was as unknown to me as it was to him.

The overall situation presented me with the question of resignation. Objectively, he would not have changed the slightest. As political and personal opponents I had the Supreme Army Command and, on the submarine question, also the majority of the Reichstag. The Emperor also stood firmly by the Supreme Army Command in his inner conviction. My objection would only have anticipated the July crisis by half a year.

A chancellor for submarine warfare would have been all the more likely to be found because he would have taken office on the basis of the great majority of the people and their representatives, supported by the unanimous demand of the army and navy.

For me, however, it was not a question of salvaging my person. My only duty was not to sabotage a decision that had become inevitable. Because I was afraid to do so, I did not resign on January 9.

In Vienna, Sofia, and Constantinople, as I knew, the new turn of the war was by no means light-hearted. My departure would have plunged our allies into still more serious doubts, could have brought about fatal differences.

My resignation would undoubtedly have been warmly welcomed by many of us. But I was entitled to assume that I still possessed a certain amount of confidence in other classes of the people, and precisely in those whose resistance could most likely be endangered by the length of the war and America's foreseeable entry into the war. I did not believe that I could answer for his abandonment.

(From the left it was later hinted that I would have had to leave at that time and then, at the head of the Social Democratic and Liberal anti-submarine movement, in the fight against Hindenburg and the Reichstag majority, I would have had to prevent the U-boat war and the break with America. I must confess that such a catastrophic adventure never lured me.)

With all these considerations in mind, I went to the joint lecture to the Emperor on the evening of January 9. There the general atmosphere was just as charged from the outset as in a conversation which I had had alone with the Supreme Army Command in the morning.

I had the feeling that I was facing men who were no longer willing to be talked into their resolutions that had already been passed. That this impression was correct was confirmed by the minutes of the meeting of the Admiral Staff with the Supreme Army Command of 8 January, which later became known.

The Admiral Staff and the Supreme Army Command presented their demands. I declared that I could not doubt the military verdict that the war in the countryside could not be successfully ended on its own. In my judgment, however, a certain success of U-boat warfare could no more be proved than a certain failure.

If success fails to materialize, we will face the worst end. I had to rate American war aid higher than the Supreme Army Command. After the Entente's response to our peace offer, however, I am not in a position to open up prospects for peace negotiations at the moment.

In view of this situation, and of the declaration, borne by Field Marshal von Hindenburg's sense of responsibility, that our military situation permits us to take upon ourselves the certain imminent risk of a break with America, I cannot advise His Majesty to contradict the vote of his military advisers.

Then the decision was made. After the lapse of about half an hour, the lecture to the Emperor, which was no longer a consultation, came to an end. The next day, the Supreme Army Command applied to the Emperor for an immediate change of chancellor.

Unrestricted submarine warfare was made because the military powers considered it necessary and promising, and because the Reichstag and the majority of the people wanted the military powers to have the last word. I consider it completely impossible that the Supreme Army Command would have allowed itself to be influenced in any way by public opinion in its decisions.

But she was impressed by "the fact that the people and the army were crying out for unrestricted submarine warfare." And indeed, popular belief had become a factor that could not be ignored.

In August 1916 I had presented to the Kaiser, to the best of my conviction, that he could not fight through a war of incalculable duration and uncertain end without having summoned to the head of the army the men who were the heroes of the people. Could the people now be led to a meagre peace before the means of war had been tested, from which the same men promised them speedy victory? No nation can tolerate not winning, despite the conviction that it can win.

The disaster that America's entry into the war has finally brought upon us also leads to incorrect conclusions. The tremendous achievements of our U-boats, the wonderful courage to die of their crews, are in danger of being lost in the condemnation to which the self-assessment of the Navy has fallen before history.

And yet it is precisely the most sober criticism that should restrain its final judgment and consider whether the incomparable achievements of the U-boats, combined with the deeds of the army, have not in reality created a state of affairs which, although not a victorious peace, has perhaps made possible a peace of renunciation far removed from the end of the catastrophe.

And the nation would have endured such a renunciation peace after it had seen that even submarine warfare did not bring the enemies to their knees.

Hindenburg

Out of My Life by Paul von Hindenburg.

The U-boat Warfare

Think of seventy million human beings living in semi starvation, thousands of them slowly succumbing to its effects! Think of all the babes in arms who perished because their mothers starved! Think of all the children who were left sick and weakly for life! And this was not in distant India or China, where a stony-hearted, pitiless Nature had refused her blessed rain, but here, in the very centre of Europe, the home of culture and humanity! A semi-starvation which was the work of the decrees and power of men who were wont to glory in their civilisation! Where is the civilisation in that? Do these men stand any higher than those others who shocked the whole civilised world by their savagery against non-combatants in the highlands of Armenia and there came to a miserable end in thousands as a punishment of Fate? No other voice than that of vengeance, certainly not that of pity, has ever spoken to the rough Anatolian peasant.

What was the object of these decrees of the champions of “civilisation”? Their plan was clear, they had seen that their military power would never enable them to realise their tyrannical ambitions, that their methods of warfare were useless against their adversary with his nerves of steel. They would therefore destroy those nerves. If it could not be done in battle, man to man, it might be done from behind, by finding a way through the Homeland. They would let the wives and children starve! “With God’s help,” that would have its effect

on the husbands and fathers at the front, perhaps not at once, but certainly by degrees! Perhaps it would compel those husbands and fathers to throw down their arms, for otherwise the menace of death would hover over their wives and children; the death — of civilisation. There were men who reasoned thus, and indeed prayed thus.

“Our enemies are hurling American shells at us. Why do we not sink the ships in which they come? Have we not the means to do so? A question of right? Where and when has our enemy ever thought about right?”

With these and similar words on their lips, the nation and the Army had turned to their leaders, not for the first time on August 29, 1916, but long before. The desire to employ the U-boat weapon in full force with a view to a speedy delivery of our homeland from its sufferings and the relief of the Army in the terrible con test, was in existence before I took over the conduct of operations. In this pitiless battle against our non-combatants at home, it was a question of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Everything else seemed callousness towards our own flesh and blood.

But though we had the weapon and the will to use it, we must not lose sight of the consequences which might flow from the ruthless employment of this destructive instrument. If we need not have any regard for the stony-hearted enemy, we must have regard for the interests of maritime nations

which had hitherto remained neutral. As a result of the employment of this weapon, the nation must not be faced with greater dangers and anxieties than those from which we proposed to deliver it. There was thus a considerable amount of hesitation, a hesitation comprehensible enough, to which ordinary human feelings also contributed.

Such was the situation when I appeared at Main Headquarters. To all the serious crises on land was now added a troublesome and fateful problem at sea. At first sight the decision of this question was the province of the Civil Government and the Naval Staff. Yet the General Staff was also seriously concerned. It was perfectly obvious that on purely military grounds we should desire the commencement of the U-boat campaign. The advantages which it would bring to our operations on land was plain to every eye. It would have been an immense relief to us if the enemy's manufacture of war material, or its transport over sea, could be materially hampered. It would be equally valuable if we succeeded at any rate in partially paralysing their over-seas operations. What an immense relief that would mean not only to Bulgaria and Turkey, but to ourselves! And it would not have cost us a drop of German blood! Further, there would be a chance of restricting the imports of raw material and food into the Entente countries to an intolerable degree, and placing England, if not her Allies, before the fateful alternative either of holding out the hand of reconciliation to us or losing her place in world trade. The U-boat campaign seemed likely to have a decisive effect on the course of the war; indeed, at the beginning of 1917 it appeared to be the only means we could employ to secure a victorious conclusion to the war if we were compelled to fight on.

The connection between the U-boat campaign and the whole military and political situation appears from a memorandum which we addressed to the Government at the end of September, 1916. This memorandum was to serve as the basis for instructions to our ambassador in Washington. It ran as follows:

“ Count Bernstorff should be told, for his personal information, that the intention of the Entente to break through on the Eastern and Western fronts has hitherto miscarried, and will miscarry in the future, as will their operations from Salonica and the Dobrudja. On the other hand, the campaign of the Central Powers against Rumania is making victorious progress. However, it is still doubtful whether we shall achieve successes this year which will end the war. We must therefore reckon that the war will continue for a considerable time longer.

“ On the other hand, in view of England's economic situation, the Imperial Admiralty promises us that by the ruthless employment of an increased number of U-boats we shall obtain a speedy victory, which will compel our principal enemy, England, to turn to thoughts of peace in a few months. For that reason, the German General Staff is bound to adopt unrestricted U-boat warfare as one of its war measures, because among other things it will relieve the situation on the Somme front by diminishing the imports of munitions and bring the futility of the Entente's efforts at this point plainly before their eyes. Finally, we could not remain idle spectators while England, realising all the difficulties with which she has to contend, makes the fullest possible use of neutral

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Powers in order to improve her military and economic situation to our disadvantage. For all these reasons we must recover the freedom of action which we reserved in the Note of May 4.

“ Of course the situation would be completely altered if President Wilson, in pursuance of the intention he has indicated, presents a proposal of mediation to the Powers. Such a proposal must, in any case, be without definite suggestions of a territorial nature, since questions of that kind must be one of the objects of the peace negotiations. Any action of this kind must be taken soon. If Wilson wished to wait until after his election, or even shortly before it, he would find that the moment for such a step had practically gone. Nor must the negotiations aim primarily at the conclusion of an armistice. They must be conducted mainly by the contending parties and lead directly to a preliminary peace within a short time. Any considerable delay would make Germany's military position worse, and mean that the Powers would make further preparations to continue the war next year, so that there would be an end to the idea of peace for a long time to come.

“ Count Bernstorff should discuss the affair with Colonel House — the intermediary between himself and the President — and ascertain the intentions of Mr. Wilson. Any action of the President in the direction of peace, which had better seem spontaneous on his part, would receive our very serious consideration, and this in itself would mean a victory for Wilson in his election campaign.”

The most difficult question was and remained : Within what time would U-boat warfare produce decisive results? ” On this question the Naval Staff could, of course, make no definite promises. But even what they alleged was an estimate based on the most conservative calculations was so favourable to us, that I considered that we were entitled to face the risk of finding that we had brought another adversary into the field as the result of employing the new weapon.

But even though the Navy was very insistent, political and military considerations demanded that the commencement of the unrestricted U-boat campaign should be postponed over the autumn of 1916. In the critical military situation in which we found ourselves at that time we dared not bring a new opponent into the field. In any case, we had to wait until the Rumanian campaign had ended victoriously. If it did so, we should find ourselves strong enough to prevent any neutral States on our frontiers from joining the ranks of our enemies, to whatever extent England might intensify her economic pressure upon them.

To considerations of a political nature were added others of a military nature. We did not wish to resort to the intensified use of the U-boat weapon until our peace step had proved a complete failure.

When this peace measure collapsed, however, military considerations alone had any weight with me. The development of the military situation, especially in Rumania, in my opinion now permitted the most drastic use of this very effective weapon.

On January 9, 1917, our All-Highest War-Lord decided in favour of the proposals of the Naval and General Staffs and against the Imperial Chancellor, von Bethmann. Not one of us was in doubt about the seriousness of the step.

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In any case, the adoption of unrestricted U-boat warfare, with its alluring prospects, increased the moral resolution of both the army and nation to continue the war on land for a long time to come.

In view of the fateful conclusion of the war, it has been suggested that the declaration of the unrestricted U-boat campaign was a last desperate throw. That judgment is intended to be a condemnation of our decision on political, military and even ethical grounds. It ignores the fact that practically all critical decisions, certainly not military decisions only, always involve a heavy risk. Indeed, the greatness of an action is mainly to be appreciated and measured by the question whether much was at stake. When a commander on the battlefield throws in his last reserves he is only doing what his country rightly demands of him. He accepts full responsibility and finds the courage to take the last decisive step without which victory cannot be won. A commander who cannot or will not dare to stake his last resources for the sake of victory is committing a crime towards his own people. If his blow fails, he is certain to have the curses and scorn of the weaklings and cowards upon his head! That is always the fate of soldiers. To act only on absolutely safe calculations, or win laurels which are not dependent on the courage to take responsibility, is to banish the very elements of greatness. The whole object of our German military training was to breed that courage. We need only point to the outstanding examples in our own history, as well as the greatest achievements of our most dangerous enemies. Could there be a better example of the bold employment of the last resources than when the Great King staked everything at Leuthen and thereby saved his country and its future? Have we not approved Napoleon's decision to send in his last battalions at Waterloo, even though, as Clausewitz says, he then slunk from the battlefield as poor as a beggar? If the Corsican had not had a Blucher against him he would have won, and world history would certainly have taken another course. On the other side, take our much-belauded "Marshal Vorwarts." Did he not stake everything in that decisive conflict? Let us hear what one of our most violent opponents had to say on this subject before the war : " The finest manoeuvre which I have ever known is the action of old Blucher, who, thrown to the ground and lying under the feet of the horses, sprang up, turned furiously on his beaten men, stopped their flight and led them from the defeat of Ligny to the triumph of Waterloo."

I cannot close this section without questioning the view that has been put forward that with the entry of America into the ranks of our enemies our cause was finally lost. But let us first take a glance at the predicament in which we put our enemies, both by our U-boat operations and, at times, by our great successes on land in the spring of 1917. We shall then be in a position to realise that we were several times within an ace of wearing the victor's laurels ourselves, and will perhaps appreciate that other than military reasons are responsible for the fact that the war did not end victoriously, or at least tolerably, for us.

Ludendorff

Ludendorff's Own Story, August 1914-November 1918: The Great War from the Siege of Liege to the Signing of the Armistice as Viewed from the Grand Headquarters of the German Army by Erich Ludendorff

NOTWITHSTANDING the successful dose of the year 1916, the outlook for the coming year was exceedingly grave. It was certain that in 1917 the Entente would again make a supreme effort, not only to make good its losses, which it was certainly in a position to do, but to add to its strength everywhere and swell its superiority in numbers. Though they had not yet recovered, our worn-out troops would have to take the offensive as early as possible, and on a greater scale than in the autumn of 1916, if they were to achieve ultimate victory.

France had already given her children. The battalions consisted now of three, instead of four companies. But she possessed in her colonies extraordinary resources in man-power, on which she drew in ever-increasing measure.

England brought her army up to strength and set about increasing it.

Russia, in particular, produced very strong new formations. Divisions were reduced to twelve battalions, the batteries to six guns, and new divisions were formed out of the surplus fourth battalions and the seventh and eighth guns of each battery. This reorganization meant a great increase in strength.

The Rumanian Army was to be reorganized and trained by French officers. Thanks to the natural affinity of the two races and the influence of France on Rumanian thought, and particularly on the Rumanian Army, it was only to be expected that the French officer soon became familiar with the psychology of the Rumanian Army and accomplished a great deal.

We had to reckon with new formations of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war and Venizelist Greeks.

Against this Germany and her allies had nothing to throw into the scale. The increase in the artillery which General Headquarters had in view, and the creation of thirteen new divisions which was under consideration, were not a real addition to our strength, as they weakened the existing formations. We could form the infantry battalions only by drawing on current reserves and reducing battalion strengths.

The creation of a Polish army would have been a real reinforcement, but it was soon seen that this would not be possible. There was nothing to do but to drain Germany and the allied countries of all their manpower that was in any way available.

. . . Dangerous additional strength was given to the enemy's numerical superiority by the ever-increasing devotion of their industries to war purposes. Far-reaching restrictions on labor were

passed into law in the Entente countries, and accepted without serious protest; ample labor force was available, and there was no shortage of raw materials ; the output per man had not fallen, and life, in short, pursued its normal course.

The seas of the world were open to the Entente. The United States was now giving help on the largest scale and breaking new ground. The technical equipment of the Entente armies grew continually stronger and more complete, reaching, indeed, an unprecedentedly high level. This was demonstrated with pitiless clarity on the Western front. In the East, too, the campaign of 1916 had shown a sensible increase in supply, especially in ammunition. Russia had, to some extent, established a war industry of her own, in part in the Donetz coal-basin, and had greatly increased her output. Japan was steadily giving better deliveries.

With the completion of the Murman Railway, and the improvement of the trans-Siberian line, an increased import from Japan, America, England, and France was inevitable. In every theater of war the Entente was able to add to its numerical superiority an enormous additional strength in every department of technical supply, and to destroy our troops on a still greater scale than had been achieved on the Somme and at Verdun.

Much could be done and had to be done by our industries to increase our strength, but plainly no little time would elapse before any arrangements to this end could be carried into effect. It was clear that our munition factories, in spite of their immense output, and however many workmen they might have, would never be able to overtake the enemy, so long as the enormous industrial areas of the latter continued to work undisturbed under what were virtually peace conditions. In the then circumstances it seemed impossible to achieve equality of forces.

With our sensible inferiority in numbers and equipment, training our defensive warfare became more important. It was obvious that our army must be equipped, organized, and trained to the highest pitch, and everything possible was done to achieve this.

We knew, however, only too well that the enemy would soon adapt himself to our new tactics and that our advantage was only temporary.

The Supreme Army Command had to bear in mind that the enemy's great superiority in men and material would be even more painfully felt in 1917 than in 1916.

It was plainly to be feared that early in the year "Somme fighting" would burst out at various points on our fronts, and that even our troops would not be able to withstand such attacks indefinitely, especially if the enemy gave us no time for rest and for the accumulation of material. Our position was unusually difficult, and no way of escape was visible. We could not contemplate an attack ourselves, having to keep our reserves available for defense. There was no hope of a collapse of any of the Entente Powers. If the war lasted our defeat seemed inevitable. Economically we were in a highly unfavorable position for a war of exhaustion. There was weakness at home. Questions of the supply of foodstuffs caused great anxiety, and so, too, did questions of morale. We were not undermining the spirits of the enemy populations with starvation, blockades, and propaganda. The

future looked dark, and our only comfort was to be found in the proud thought that we had hitherto succeeded in defying the enemy superiority in numbers, and that our line was everywhere beyond our frontiers.

II

The Field-Marshal and I were fully at one in this anxious view of the situation. Our conclusion was no sudden one, but had gradually grown upon us since we took over our posts at the end of August 1916. As a result of our opinion the construction had been begun as early as September of powerful rear positions in the West; the Siegfried line, running from Arras, west of Cambrai, St.-Quentin, La Fere, Bailly-sur-Aisne, to flatten the wide salient from Albert, Roye, southwest of Noyon, Soissons, Bailly-sur-Aisne, in which the Somme fighting had made a large indentation ; and the Michael line, which lay to the south of Verdun and in front of the line Etain-Gorz, to cut off the salient of St.-Mihiel. These strategic positions had the great advantage of shortening the front and economizing forces, and their occupation was prepared in detail.

Whether we should retire on them, and how the positions would be used, was not of course decided in September 1916; the important thing then was to get them built. This made comprehensive measures necessary, and I demanded heavy labor supplies from home.

These, however, sufficed only for the West, and corresponding positions in the East had to be left unbuilt.

The construction of positions, the training of the army for defensive warfare, and the enlistment of the civilian population for war work constituted weapons of war of the greatest importance. They were capable of postponing the decision, if the Government once succeeded in bringing the people whole-heartedly into support of the war, but they could never lead to victory.

The future was thus full of obscurity, and the soldier could not reckon on chances, so that the questions of peace and submarine warfare became of the highest importance. There was the problem of obtaining peace, the chance of defeat without unrestricted submarine warfare, and the possibility of victory by means of such a campaign, accompanied by an attack by our surface fleet and a defensive war on land.

The description "unrestricted submarine warfare" is not wholly apt, any more than is "submarine warfare without regard to consequences."

The Chancellor was, in September 1916, giving consideration to a possible negotiation for peace through President Wilson. Many circles in Germany were ill disposed to such a step, since the attitude of benevolence adopted by the United States toward the Entente had raised increasing bitterness among us, and the Government could with difficulty disregard this opinion. The Chancellor nevertheless proposed to His Majesty that instructions should be given to Ambassador Count Bernstorff to induce the President at the earliest possible moment, and in any case before the presidential election at the beginning of November, to make a proposal of peace to the Powers.

I was fully in agreement with the suggestion, and secretly very pleased that it was made, although I was skeptical of success, owing to my view of the enemy's desire for our destruction. Their prospects for 1917 were so much more favorable than ours that, even while I hoped for it, I had grave doubts as to the success of any offer from President Wilson. I waited with the greatest eagerness to learn whether he would make a proposal in October, but his re-election in November and the whole of the month of November passed without his making up his mind to do so, and I gave up any hope of his intervention.

Count Burian then came forward with the proposal that the Quadruple Alliance should itself make a direct offer of peace to the enemy. I was equally skeptical as to the success of this scheme, but thought that it should be tried: the only thing to avoid at all costs was any display of weakness. This would have had a very bad effect on the army and the public, and would have encouraged the Entente to redouble its efforts for our destruction. So far as he permitted, I cooperated with the Chancellor in the matter. In order to avoid giving the enemy the false impression that weakness was our motive for the proposal, I asked that it should not be carried out until the campaign in Rumania had been brought to a conclusion. Bucharest fell on December 6, and with that I regarded the military position as so secure that I had no objection to the publication of the peace note. The proposal for compulsory auxiliary service, which had meanwhile been passed into law, gave the appearance of a determination to continue fighting if our offer was rejected.

His Majesty took a most earnest interest in the peace offer, displaying clearly his high sense of his responsibility to bring peace to the world at the earliest possible moment. On December 12 the peace offer of the Quadruple Alliance was made. There followed an exchange of views as to the conditions of peace which we would be prepared to offer, which was, however, destined to meet its end in the despatch to Count Bernstorff of January 29, 1917.

The reception of our offer by the Entente press was wholly unfavorable. It soon became clear that it would be impossible to come to an understanding.

The Entente had its hands tied by arrangements and secret agreements that could be carried out only if we were completely defeated. The answer of the Entente, given on January 30, was such as to leave no doubt of its intention to annihilate us. The objection, that the tone of our offer had from the first made any acceptance impossible, was quite unsound. Our whole position compelled us to adopt a tone of confidence.

I advocated this from the military point of view.

Our troops had done marvels. How would they be affected by our adopting any other tone? It was essential that the peace offer should not impair the fighting quality of the army, and it did not do so, for it was only an episode, and the morale of the troops was still good. If the Entente had honestly desired a peace of justice and reconciliation it could and should have entered into negotiations and brought forward its demands. Had negotiations broken down on any demand for annexations on the part of the German representatives it would have been easy for the Entente, in

the light of such an attitude, to stir its peoples to renew the war, while we in such a position would have been quite unable to reconcile the German people, who were already longing for peace, to any further fighting. Still less would our weary allies have continued to fight at our side. This simple reasoning shows convincingly that when we made our offer we were genuinely ready for a peace of justice and reconciliation.

The attitude of the Entente on this and on every subsequent occasion shows equally clearly that it wanted no negotiations that might display to the world our sincere desire for peace. It feared that in its own camp this would lead to a weakening in the desire for our destruction and wished also that peace, when it came, should be definitely a peace of defeat and emasculation for us.

Meanwhile President Wilson had at last, on December 20, addressed a note to all the belligerent Powers, inviting an expression of "their views as to the terms on which the war could be brought to an end." The President apparently desired to find an agreement by means of a compromise between the demands of the two sides. He had in mind a peace without victor or vanquished. The note was delivered on December 21.

The German Government had been informed of the President's intention in November. Presumably the Government was by this time, after the long delay, in doubt as to whether the President would in fact carry out his intention, but I am not aware in any detail of the Government's attitude at that time.

As early as December 26 the governments of the Quadruple Alliance proposed an early meeting of representatives of the belligerents in some neutral country. They were at variance with Wilson's proposal to the extent that they preferred direct negotiations with their opponents; this may well have been in part due to regard for the strong trend of public opinion in Germany against the United States. The Entente remained wholly hostile. Its answer of January 12 was a confirmation of its note of December 30, being perhaps still more strongly imbued with the intention of destroying us. The voice of the latter answer is the voice of the iron Lloyd George, who at the beginning of December had assumed, in form as well as in substance, the reins of power in England. It is useful to re-read the answers of the Entente to our offer of peace and to Wilson's note. The judgment of many people as to the possibility of a peace of understanding will then become clearer.

Thus failed the two efforts to achieve peace. By the will of the Entente the war had to continue, and to be decided by force of arms. It was to be victory or defeat. The results were further preparations on a large scale, the maintenance of our determination to fight — this our proposals were designed to achieve — and at the same time the employment of every weapon in Germany's arsenal.

III

The Field-Marshal and myself, in our view of the whole situation and in our only too correct doubt as to the success of the peace proposals, had already had under consideration, as part of our military problems, the possibility of carrying on the submarine campaign in an intensified form.

Unrestricted submarine warfare was now the only means left to secure in any reasonable time a victorious end to the war. If submarine warfare on this scale could have a decisive effect — and the navy held that it could — then in the existing situation it was our plain military duty to the German nation to embark on this form of warfare.

As has been mentioned, we had both spoken against the proposal for unrestricted warfare on August 30, expressing the view that the time was not yet ripe for it. Chancellor von Bethmann stated this quite clearly at the time, and added that thenceforth the decision to carry on the submarine warfare in the form of "blockaded area" fighting would depend on the declaration of the Field-Marshal — that is to say, unrestricted submarine warfare was to start when the Field-Marshal wished it to start. The Chancellor spoke to the same effect in the Reichstag on September 28. The question of the expediency of the submarine campaign had meanwhile led to grave differences of opinion among the political parties, and had excited unusual passions.

While the parties of the Right were enthusiastically in favor of its adoption, the Left, which was more in touch with the Government, was equally strongly opposed. Von Bethmann's statement for the first time brought the Supreme Army Command into the field of politics to support the Government. This I regretted deeply, and in my view the statement should not have been made. The Supreme Army Command had consistently held aloof from all political activity, and had no wish to alter its policy in this respect, so that the political excitement created by Von Bethmann's step was all the more embarrassing to the Field-Marshal and myself. Nevertheless, the Supreme Army Command came, in fact, more and more to be regarded as responsible for the adoption or non-adoption of unrestricted submarine warfare.

At the beginning of October we had discussed the question of adopting this weapon with the Chief of the Naval Staff. In the course of the correspondence with the Chancellor on the matter we again urged him on October 5 to settle the question of responsibility.

He replied on the 6th with the statement that the decision really lay with the Emperor, as the War Lord of the Empire, but that it was also a question of foreign policy, owing to its effect on neutrals; the Chancellor accordingly was, constitutionally, the only person responsible, and could not transfer the burden to any one else; but the attitude of the Field-Marshal to the matter would naturally have the greatest weight with him. This standpoint was unexceptionable. The Field-Marshal was not in a position to take any of the Chancellor's responsibility, and had never even thought of doing so; I quite agreed with him. The Chancellor's declaration was, however, a substantial change of front when compared with his earlier statements, which had been made on the assumption that we were opposed to the submarine warfare.

In October 1916 submarine cruiser warfare began, ships being stopped and searched. This met with some success, and had a disturbing effect upon the economic situation of the enemy. This success spoke well for the submarine weapon, but the enemy's defensive measures against our boats were soon improved, and results fell off considerably.

In estimating the economic effects of the various forms of submarine warfare we were compelled to rely upon the judgment of the Chief of the Naval Staff and of the Chancellor. The Supreme Army Command was in constant communication with both these authorities on the whole matter, and in particular on the question of the expediency of adopting unrestricted warfare.

After our victories in Rumania the Supreme Army Command did not expect that either Holland or Denmark would enter the war against us. It was, however, unwise to take any risks, the unrestricted campaign could obviously not be instituted before the Rumanian campaign was at an end and our troops there had returned home and arrived on the Western and Eastern fronts. It was soon clear that this would not be the case before the beginning of February. It also seemed plain that we should have to hold our hands to see whether any success would be achieved by any intervention by President Wilson, along the lines indicated by our Government in September, or by our own offer of peace. If the end of the war should appear to be in sight, submarine warfare on the lines proposed would be unnecessary. There was really no room for doubt. The result of our efforts for peace would be sure to be known by the end of December or early in January, and this, too, seemed to point to the beginning of February as the date for opening the unrestricted campaign, if this should prove necessary.

The Government had by now lost its early anxiety as to the attitude of Holland and Denmark, and none was felt as to Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, or Norway.

On the other hand, it thought it very probable that the United States would join in the war against us. The Supreme Army Command had to take into account, in dealing with the military situation, the views thus expressed in the responsible quarters. It would involve an addition to the armed forces of the Entente of five or six divisions in the first year after America entered the war, and later on, if the submarine war did not have a decisive effect, a serious, indeed a vital increase in the strength of the enemy. It could not be doubted that America, if she came into the war, would arm herself in the same way that England had done, and that the Entente would lead the United States from one energetic step to another. I had, however, no serious fear as to any increased output of munitions in the States, as they were already working with all their might for the Entente.

The Chief of the Naval Staff, a friend of the Chancellor, but at the same time a warm partizan of the unrestricted submarine war, was confident that the campaign would have decisive results within six months. The loss of freight space and the reduction of oversea imports would produce economic difficulties in England that would render a continuance of the war impossible. In forming this view he did not rely merely upon his own professional judgment, but was also supported by the opinions of distinguished German economists. The shortage of shipping would cut down the transport of munitions, and in particular the transport from England to France, which traffic could also be directly attacked. The number of submarines in commission was sufficient for the work, and our Admiralty was also of the opinion that construction, if it was pressed to the utmost, would amply cover losses. In 1916, after submarine warfare had really been abandoned in principle,

construction had not been pressed very vigorously. The question of crews could, it was thought, be solved.

They would have to be drawn mainly from the secondline fleet, which consisted of the oldest ships, but the other vessels also would have to release officers and engineers in the prime of their service years.

The surface fleet was not, of course, to fall below a certain standard of strength. It had to be maintained at a sufficient level, in the face of the enemy forces, which were constantly increasing through new construction, and might be further strengthened by the adhesion of the Americans, to assist in the maintenance of the submarine campaign. It had the duty of insuring the passage of the submarines through the enemy minefields. It remained, in fact, sufficiently formidable to thwart every attempt of the enemy to interrupt sea traffic in the Baltic.

The Chief of the Naval Staff also hoped that the declaration of unrestricted warfare would have a deterrent effect upon neutral shipping, which had, up to then, been of great assistance to the Entente. He was quite convinced of the necessity for the strongest support, on this point, from political quarters, which proved in the event to be sometimes lacking.

The amount of shipping necessary for the transport of troops from America to France and for the supply of reinforcements was discussed. Our navy reckoned that the freight space required for the transport of an army with baggage and reinforcements amounted to five British register tons per man. This estimate was confirmed by our experience in the attack on Oesel in the autumn of 1917. It would thus be necessary, in order to transport 1,000,000 American soldiers in a reasonable time, to employ 5,000,000 tons of shipping space.

Such a quantity of shipping, in view of the necessity for maintaining supplies to the Western Powers, could not be spared even temporarily.

The economic value of the campaign was the subject of varying opinion in our Government. The Ministry of the Interior gradually came round (and this only after the campaign had begun) to a view of its high value, and the Chancellor adopted this view also.

With my knowledge of the military situation and my firm views as to the determination of the enemy I did not accept literally the estimates of our Admiralty as to the probable effects of unrestricted submarine warfare; I knew, moreover, that questions of transport and of economics generally are very difficult to decide. I did, however, think it safe to reckon that it would have a decisive effect within twelve months— that is to say, before America could throw her new formations into the scale. I hoped that, with the measures already taken and to be taken, we could hold out for this period on land, assuming that the submarine campaign produced sufficient disturbance of the enemy's economy to reduce his industrial output of war material, and cut down substantially his shipments of munitions to France. For the first few months I attributed the greatest importance to the latter point.

I was greatly impressed with the seriousness of the position by a tour which I took of the Western front at the middle of December, with a view to reviewing the whole situation, and telegraphed my views to Berlin; at that time I had already abandoned hope of any success from our offer of peace. In a long discussion on December 23 the Field-Marshal expressed to the Chancellor his view that the adoption of unrestricted submarine warfare was essential. The latter on the 24th stated that he was ready to initiate discussion on the matter as soon as the answer expected from the Entente to our peace proposal had brought the matter more or less to finality; he repeated, however, his declaration of October 6 to the effect that the adoption of the campaign was a question of foreign policy, and that he and he alone bore and could bear the constitutional responsibility for the step. Our view of the matter had not changed. The Chancellor had his responsibilities to bear, and we had ours. In a telegram to Von Bethmann the Field-Marshal made his position clear in the following words: "... Your Excellency as Chancellor can, of course, claim the sole responsibility, but I must clearly work, with all my strength and with a full sense of my responsibility, for the victorious end of the war, to see that everything is done which I hold as proper for the achievement of that end." That was the right and duty of the Supreme Army Command, just as it was the right and duty of the Chancellor, in this difficult and momentous question, to support his own opinion with all the prestige of his high office. If there were differences of opinion, the decision lay with His Majesty.

As it seemed probable that the answer of the Entente, both to our offer of peace and to Wilson's proposal for intervention, would be a refusal, the Chancellor came to Pless to discuss the question as early as the end of December, but nothing definite was then decided. The actual decision was arrived at on January 9, after the receipt of the answer to our peace offer, and in the certainty that a like reply would be given to President Wilson, at a meeting presided over by His Majesty. The Chief of the Naval Staff expressed the views stated above; he advised that the campaign would be decisive in a few months, and urged its adoption. The Field-Marshal reported our view of the situation, and also advised its adoption.

The Chancellor stated the effect that the use of this weapon might have upon neutrals, and in particular upon the United States. He thought it possible, and indeed probable, that the United States would enter the war, and anticipated difficulties with regard to the provisioning of Belgium by the Entente. He regarded our offer of peace as having failed; he saw no other possibility of achieving peace, not even by a new attempt on the part of Wilson (the note of December 18 had already failed) ; he had no hope of a separate peace, and he did not anticipate any improvement in our position through the collapse of one of our enemies, such as subsequently happened in the case of Russia.

The likelihood of this happening would, of course, have altered the whole situation and would have had the greatest weight in the formation of our opinions. The Chancellor's judgment as to our military position was the same as our own. While we felt compelled resolutely to draw the inevitable and serious inference, and act upon it, the Chancellor, as his nature was, remained undecided, but came to such conclusions as : " The decision to embark upon the campaign depends upon the effects which are to be expected from it, " and, "If the military authorities regard it as

essential, I am not in a position to withstand them," and, "If success beckons, we must take the step."

However, with a full sense of his political responsibility, the Chancellor did advise the adoption of the campaign, as did His Majesty's other advisers. The Emperor fell in with their views and commanded that the campaign should open on February 1; he directed, however, that time should be given to neutral vessels in the blockaded area to leave it, and to neutral vessels on their way to the area to complete their voyages.

The Chancellor then prepared, in co-operation with the Chief of the Naval Staff, the notes to neutral Powers as to the declaration of the blockade area around England, along the west coast of France, and in the Mediterranean. These were to be delivered on January 31.

The Chief of the Naval Staff gave the detailed instructions for operations in the blockaded area, making various concessions to the wishes of the Foreign Office in order to lessen the danger of a rupture with America.

We were, of course, quite in accord with this.

[...]

IV

In the middle of January the Supreme Army Command received from the Foreign Office a transcript of a despatch from Count Bernstorff of January 10, to the effect that the note dealing with armed merchant vessels "would frustrate President Wilson's proposals for intervening to negotiate peace." This surprised me, as all idea of any definite intervention by the President had vanished. Count Bernstorff could not be referring to anything else than the step taken by the President on December 18, which was not officially answered by the Entente until January 12, but was definitely put an end to by that answer, as we had anticipated. I was unaware of any new step or proposal, and so was the Chancellor. He accordingly replied to Bernstorff on January 16, "We are resolved to take the risk" (of rupture and even of war with the United States). This cablegram had probably not reached Count Bernstorff when he wired again to the Foreign Office: "Unless military considerations are absolutely decisive, it would be highly desirable to postpone institution" (of the unrestricted warfare).

"Wilson believes he can secure peace on the basis proposed by us of equality of rights for all nations."

In forwarding us this cablegram the Secretary of Foreign Affairs wrote that he had urged the Chief of the Naval Staff to lessen the danger of a rupture with America by fixing certain definite periods of grace for neutral ships, which the ambassador had proposed. I at once replied that we agreed to this. It is clear that the Foreign Office had not concluded, even from this second communication from Bernstorff, that there was any modification of the general situation, for the Secretary would otherwise have mentioned it.

I never had a clear understanding of the correspondence between the Government and the Ambassador; indeed, I learned of it only in fragments.

I knew nothing of the progress of the negotiation with the United States. The Chancellor and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs complained of the difficulties of communication and of the resulting ambiguities. They had, of course, to use every possible chance to avoid a rupture with the United States, in spite of the existence of the unrestricted campaign.

On January 29, unexpectedly, so far as I was concerned, Chancellor von Bethmann and Secretary of State Zimmermann arrived at Pless. We were bidden to attend a discussion with the Emperor over a new proposal for intervention by President Wilson. The Chancellor read a despatch which he had drafted for transmission to Count Bernstorff, in which he proposed that we should declare for peace on the status quo ante basis.

So far as I remember, the despatch proposed the submission to President Wilson, then or on any later opportunity, the following claims as the basis for possible peace negotiations: "Restoration of the portions of Upper Alsace occupied by France.

"A frontier securing Germany and Poland strategically and economically against Russia.

"Restoration of colonies on the basis of an agreement securing to Germany colonial possessions corresponding to her population and her economic interests.

"Return to France of the territory occupied by Germany, subject to strategic and economic rectification of frontiers, and to financial compensation.

"Restoration of Belgium, subject to definite guaranties for Germany's safety, which would be negotiated with the Belgian Government.

"Economic and financial adjustment on the basis of the exchange of conquered territories given up by either side to the other on the conclusion of peace.

"Indemnity to German concerns or subjects injured by the war.

"Renunciation of all economic measures or treaties calculated to interfere after the conclusion of peace with normal trade or communication, and the conclusion of the commercial agreements necessary thereto.

"The guaranteeing of the freedom of the seas."

These are the only German conditions which ever reached the enemy from our side with any cooperation on my part.

The Chancellor did not suggest a postponement of the unrestricted campaign, but the ambassador was authorized to explain that our Government was ready to order the cessation of the campaign immediately any basis for peace negotiations was worked out that offered any real hope of success. The Field-Marshal and I agreed to this.

The whole discussion took place in one of the Emperor's rooms and occupied but little time. The Emperor's birthday presents were still lying about, and I remember in particular a fine picture of the cruiser Emden. I know no more than the above as to the circumstances surrounding this diplomatic step, nor the course which it followed. I mentioned to the Field Marshal, after the discussion was over, my resentment at the manner in which our co-operation in these tremendously important decisions had been obtained.

Although we had no clear knowledge of the situation, we had to bear our share of the moral responsibility.

On January 31 our note as to the declaration of the submarine campaign was delivered in Washington, as also, I assume, was the Government's above-mentioned proposal of January 29.

After January 9 there were no military reasons whatever to cause either the Field-Marshal or myself to modify our views as to the urgent need for the unrestricted campaign.

[...]

In judging public opinion on the matter at home, I regarded as a very important element the sitting of the Reichstag of February 27, in which it appeared that, after the failure of our peace offer, the German people were practically unanimous in supporting the Government. The leader of the Majority Socialists, Herr Scheidemann, while refusing any responsibility for the submarine campaign, spoke as follows: "Every one will understand the deep satisfaction which we felt when we learned that the Government had made an offer of peace to the world, based on views similar to our own. When the enemy's notorious reply to Wilson stripped the veil from his plans for conquest and annihilation, the determination to defend our country resolutely was again restored. There was then but one voice — anything rather than such a peace!

No one had expected that the enemy would accept the German invitation to a conference without some show of reluctance, without emphasizing his own strength, without a certain maneuvering for position and preliminary negotiation; but it is equally certain that no one had anticipated a tone so brutal and provocative, or a peace program so extravagant, so utterly at variance with the facts of the situation. They will never wipe away the stain of the crime against humanity committed by their brutal refusal of Germany's peace offer. Lloyd George is the true godfather of our Government's resolution to adopt the unrestricted submarine campaign. Once this resolution has been made, and the campaign has begun, we, too, can but hope with all our hearts that it will bring us peace quickly.

We trust in the national strength, now fully mobilized, to achieve what our enemies hold to be impossible.

Our honor, our existence, our free economic development, must come unimpaired out of this terrible struggle."

LUDENDORFF

That was a noble profession of faith, and in the face of the enemy's will to annihilation, a call to fight to the last. One hoped that it might be realized.

Bauer

The Great War in Field and Home: Memories and Reflections, by Max Bauer

Bauer was a favorite of Ludendorff's, having come up through the army staff with significant achievements in defense procurement and tactical innovation. With Ludendorff, he was involved in the 1920 Kapp Putsch, leading to his exile; he died in 1929 while serving as one of the German advisors to the Chinese military.

(pp. 125-128)

...It created the impression that the long continuation of the war was now certain. As is well known, our peace offer collided with a "peace feeler" from Wilson. In reality, this lacked any solid foundation, and it was only right that we did not let it distract us. Our peace offer was therefore issued and met with a scornful and deceitful rejection that exceeded even our expectations. This was actually favorable for us, as now no one in Germany could still hope for a negotiated peace but had to recognize the unwavering resolve of our adversaries.

Opening of the Unrestricted Submarine Warfare

The path was now clear for unrestricted submarine warfare. It is necessary, in response to later accusations, to refute the claim that the political disadvantages of submarine warfare were not sufficiently considered. First, it must be noted that we had no other option but to resort to submarines.

The accusations culminate in the claim that America was driven into the war by submarine warfare and that America's entry caused our defeat. Both claims are inaccurate in this form. By 1917 (unlike in 1914/15), America was already primed for war; the campaign of lies and our own mistakes had brought it to that point. American high finance and industry were so intertwined with the Entente that they could not tolerate even the possibility of a German victory. They wanted war, and they would have undoubtedly achieved it as soon as victory tilted toward Germany. And when this happened in the spring of 1917, America declared war. It is also certain that the ever-growing support America provided to the Entente with war materials was so immense that, if left unchecked, it threatened to crush us. And since, as already mentioned, the war increasingly became a "material war," there was no question that 1917 could bring the collapse of the Western Front if we failed to significantly reduce these dangers. Pleading was useless, so submarine warfare was the only option; the obstacle was closer than the solution.

However, if submarines were not responsible for America's entry into the war as such, but at most marginally for its timing, they are also not responsible for the lost war, even if the war was lost due to America's aid. But, as we will see, this is only conditionally true, namely only insofar as Germany, shaken by the developing revolution, could no longer fully deploy its military strength. Only through this did America's aid gain such significantly increased importance.

Thus, as noted earlier: Without the deliberate internal destabilization of our people, we would have prevailed despite America's entry into the war; at most, one could argue that if America had stayed out of the war, we would have successfully concluded it before the homeland betrayed the army. This only proves how much, indeed how solely, the revolution caused the war's outcome. The claim that submarines did not outweigh America's entry carries no weight.

It should also be noted that, according to Ludendorff's estimation, America could not deploy trained units in significant numbers before 1918 (which proved correct). However, as stated, we first had to survive 1917, and the Supreme Army Command, based on the authoritative statements of the responsible naval experts at the time, had the well-founded expectation that by spring 1918, submarines would have at least fulfilled their task to the extent that America's intervention, in terms of timing and scope, was no longer to be feared.

It created confusion, thwarted many of their plans, paralyzed their decisions for months, and even influenced their willingness for peace, until the disastrous action in the Reichstag came, and with it, the era of our internal crises became a permanent fixture on the agenda.

If one must, in the dear German tradition, construct a criticism, it could at most be that the expectations placed on submarines were exaggerated. Certainly, it did not come to pass that submarines fully accomplished their tasks within five months or a year. This was due, firstly, to England's improved supply situation since 1914, secondly, to England's ruthless seizure of neutral shipping space, thirdly, to the unexpected improvement of defensive measures, and finally, to the fact that the construction and improvement of submarines were not pursued with the full vigor that was possible and necessary. The first three points could hardly have been anticipated to the extent they occurred. From the fourth, one can now, in hindsight, construct blame. More could likely have been done in technical development and construction. However, I must note that during a trip in the winter of 1917/18, aimed at determining how much construction could be accelerated, all experts declared it impossible under the given circumstances. These statements completely dispelled my doubts at the time, as nothing in the armaments industry could be held back, and we could not free up workers. The real blame lies further back, in the years 1914–16, as discussed earlier.

I have addressed the submarine issue here, anticipating events, in a cohesive manner. Back then (1916), we naturally did not see everything as clearly as we do now, but the fundamental considerations were the same, and they were correct. Some have tried to use the diplomatic correspondence surrounding the declaration of submarine warfare as proof of America's love for peace and our provocation. That is a false path. It must be considered that all the exchanged notes were largely a façade. They were all geared toward shaping public opinion in a specific direction, and none revealed the true intentions of the respective governments. Thus, they are more important as documents of how nations are led or misled than as historical truth. The diplomatic notes had little impact on the actual course of events. War with America would have come even if we had spoken with the tongues of angels; and we did not need to put ourselves in a bad light.

Worse for us was that hopes were raised among the German people that were unfulfillable and remained unfulfilled. It could not be achieved in half a year. Indeed, if we could have launched submarine warfare in August 1914 as we did in February 1917, success would likely have been ours within half a year. But let us not forget that these unfulfilled hopes weighed so heavily on our people only because Scheidemann, Erzberger, and their ilk capitalized on them for their politics and their obsession with negotiation. The Entente states made far greater promises to their peoples that went unfulfilled—yet no one held them accountable. Of course, men like Erzberger, Scheidemann, Dittmann, and others would have been quickly neutralized elsewhere. The pitiful weakness of the government is to blame here as well, though this does not excuse the aforementioned “politicians.”

The government, i.e., Bethmann-Hollweg, played a peculiar role. On one hand, he claimed the decision on whether to launch unrestricted submarine warfare as part of his purview, while on the other, he sought from the outset to shift responsibility to the Supreme Army Command. I do not believe he acted in bad faith, as he rightly expected no benefit from it. Nevertheless, he could likely have ensured, through more skillful handling, that we were not entirely in the wrong vis-à-vis America.

In summary: America would have entered the war against us even without unrestricted submarine warfare. Submarine warfare was absolutely necessary, but it required the full commitment of all resources. Only then would it not only offset the political disadvantages but could bring about the war’s decision at the right time. That we were not on the verge of this in the fall of 1918 will be discussed later.

BAUER

A note on sources

Some of the primary sources in this edited volume are from contemporary English translations. The German generals attracted such interest, as did the parliamentary inquiry. The other politicians were less likely to be translated – I could only find the first volume of Bethmann-Hollweg’s memoirs already translated, and this focuses on the beginning of the war. Thus, several of the memoirs were taken from digitized German-language originals, which were then machine transcribed and machine translated, with spot checking for accuracy. All originals are available freely online and are in the public domain due to their age.