

CHAPTER II

A SHORT WAR
OR A LONG ONE?

THERE is a continuous public debate on the question whether this is to be a long war or a short war. Despite a certain confusion involved in such a formulation, we may take the question as the starting point for discussion, in the course of which we can get closer to the real issues.

For the United Nations, the military objective is the destruction of the Axis regimes and the establishment of such succession-regimes as will provide the guarantee against a revival of the policy of aggression. Nothing short of this result is victory.

How long the war is to be, therefore, depends upon how much time is required to win the victory. Those who discuss the question in any other terms are really victims of a hidden defeatism.

Policy, diplomatic and military as well as domestic, must subordinate every consideration to victory at the earliest possible moment—to make the war as short as possible, as the only means of minimizing defeatist influences and the cost in human life and accumulated resources. At the same time, our country and the United Nations as a whole must be prepared to conduct the war as long as may be necessary for victory—to be morally and materially prepared for the possibility of a long war.

We will make the war shorter to the extent that we gather all our forces and throw them into the scales of

battle. We will make the war longer with every delay we permit.

The debate on a long or short war is thus not a debate with words but a debate conducted on the one hand in terms of the energy with which we gather all forces and throw them into the struggle—the strongest and only final “argument” for a short war—and on the other, by the extent to which we permit “politics as usual” and “business as usual” to obstruct, weaken, and undermine the war effort—the “argument” which effectively prolongs the war and makes it more costly.

Nothing but confusion can arise from any debate on the question of “A Short War or a Long One,” unless we fully understand that *the issue depends upon what we do from this moment on*. We will decide the question by the way we act, as a nation, as groups, and individually. The war is being fought out, therefore, in each and every act and word, and even in every thought of each American, his group, and his nation as a whole. The sum and result of all our acts, words, and thoughts will decide whether we Americans, as a nation, *have the ability to make the war a short one*.

The determination, courage, perseverance, patience, energy, as well as all other capacities and abilities of our country, are put to the test by the war. Above all is being tested our ability to think straight—the most difficult test of all.

We, Americans as a nation, have hardly begun to think as yet about some of the most fundamental questions of this war. How are we going to halt the mounting tide of Axis victories when we have hardly begun to understand how the Axis won those victories? We are still thinking narrowly, in fragments, about this or that small aspect or

problem of the war, not realizing or forgetting that a global war requires "global thinking" on the part of everyone who is seriously determined to affect its outcome.

The production of armaments, the mobilization of the nation's economy to the single end of war, is clearly a basic requirement of victory, and the speed of mobilization is a basic factor in determining whether the war shall be short or long. This is perhaps the most widely appreciated and understood factor of war policy. I have no desire to minimize its importance; and in later chapters will speak of war production and broader economic problems at some length. But at this early stage of my discussion, it is necessary to emphasize above everything else that *armaments, even overwhelming superiority in armaments, are not enough for an early victory.*

I know of nothing which can so completely drive home this truth as the simple fact, too often forgotten, that Germany, the keystone and stronghold of Axis world power, was ten years ago a disarmed and helpless nation, and her present Axis partners, Japan and Italy, were second-rate powers struggling with economic crises and relying upon American help. The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, now the core of the United Nations, together with France, now Hitler's helpless victim, ten years ago possessed or controlled fully ninety per cent of the world's effective military striking power. But in less than ten years, that relation of military forces has been transformed so drastically that Germany has crushed every military force in Europe except the Red Army, and with Italy, is threatening Suez and the Near East, while Japan has occupied practically all the Far East except Australia and Eastern Siberia, and the Axis seriously threatens world conquest. If military power were all-decisive, the Axis

could never have arisen. This is a truth of the most profound consequences, most of which Americans are only beginning to learn. It must never be forgotten. Its lessons contain the answers to all problems involved in whether we must fight a short war or a long one.

Today, in the midst of life-and-death war, global war which will determine the fate of mankind for generations, we are repeating most of the mistakes of policy, in one or another form, which over ten years built up the non-entity Hitler to the threatening world conqueror. We have not learned the lessons yet, except partially and incompletely. And if we do not learn them well, then at best the war will be a long, difficult, and most disastrous one.

We are repeating a basic mistake of the past when we console ourselves that after all the United States is potentially as powerful as the rest of the world put together, and that if necessary we can lick Hitler by ourselves "with one hand tied" as the traditional American boast puts it. This spirit of smug complacency, not so voluble since Pearl Harbor, is still the confirmed habit of thought of too many men in positions of power and influence, all the more potent when unconscious. We had better accustom ourselves to the thought that until we drastically cut out the mistakes of the past ten years which brought catastrophe upon us and the world, cut them out root and branch, it is entirely possible that America will be licked, and licked shamefully. And then it will not matter much whether the war is short or long.

Defeat in this war for America, let us never tire of repeating, will not be simply a "deplorable incident" in our history. It will be the end of the history of the United States of America. Future historians, in such an event, after humanity had painfully climbed out of Nazi slavery and

attained civilization again, would speak of the U.S.A. as a "brilliant experiment" which lasted less than two centuries, full of promise and hope, but which was finally destroyed by a fatal inability of its leaders to think deeply enough to meet its supreme crisis, even though it held every material necessity in its hands. It is necessary to recognize this shameful possibility, in order that we may rouse every American to the exertion of all his powers, mental, moral, and physical, to make such an end of our history impossible, to organize America's powers to the full and throw them into the scales of battle while victory is still possible.

The will to victory, the subordination of everything to victory, must be made the starting point for the understanding of those policies which alone can bring victory.

For the earliest possible victory, the policies required are those which will most effectively accomplish the following aims:

1. The unity of the nation, the conscious collaboration of the great majority of the people, and of all important groups, in the maximum exertion of all the force of the nation; this is sometimes spoken of under the term "civilian morale."

2. The closest and most firm unity with the fighting allies of our country, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and China, and the consolidation of the United Nations around this alliance.

3. The winning of new allies, the recruitment of new forces against the Axis, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the calling up of all possible reserves in the fight.

4. The full mobilization of American industry, as of all the United Nations, and its economy, including agriculture, to produce everything needed for victory in the war.

These objectives of policy, here stated in their most

general form (to be taken up in more detail in the following chapters), are interconnected and interdependent. They are equally necessary for victory, and the speed and thoroughness with which they are realized will determine whether the war will be short or long.

As set forth above, in their most general form, these aims of policy would arouse little objection or controversy. Everyone but a conscious enemy of the United States is eager, or at least willing, to see these aims achieved if—the fatal "if"—it is done on the terms considered satisfactory to him. What man is not eager to see national unity—if the nation unites on his own terms. And who objects, or could object, to the other nations uniting with the United States if they took the terms of unity entirely from us. And so on. Thus easily does agreement upon general aims dissolve at the first touch into the most fierce controversy over the means of achieving them.

The fatal "if" that stands as an obstacle to working out concrete policies which will achieve the preconditions of victory can only be overcome and dissolved by setting against it another "if"—if we are *slow* in getting general agreement on effective policies the war will be long and costly; if we *fail* to get agreement we will be destroyed as a nation and enslaved as a people.

The stern requirements of survival, the iron laws of military necessity, drive us to submerge our differing and even antagonistic interests and ideas in an agreement which has but one single criterion—will it help increase the striking power of our nation and its allies, will it help win the war in the shortest possible time?

Under the hammer blows of military disasters we achieved our first big steps in the establishment of policy in the spirit here indicated, in the Anglo-Soviet-American

alliance, and the United Nations Pact. It will be sad, indeed, if we are to require a new disaster to push us into each new step—that would be a long and bloody road to victory, unnecessarily long and unnecessarily bloody.

Effective war policy can be established in one of two ways: the Nazi way is the terroristic dictatorship over the nation by a small minority of ruthless men ruling everything in their own interest by force and violence; the other, the democratic way, is to adjust policy to the proved interests and ideas of the majority of the people and to every important and necessary group, carefully limiting the field in which such policy must be *imposed* against opposition (“democratic dictatorship”) to the smallest possible number of the incurables who persist against all suasion in setting their particular interests above the interests of the nation.

We have powerful interests and spokesmen in the United States who are enamoured of the Nazi way of doing things, and who want to move our country in that direction.* For example, ex-President Herbert Hoover recently advocated as a “war measure” that we copy “Nazi economics.” But what is this thing he calls “Nazi economics”? It is built on slave labor, the only distinctive thing about Nazi economics, slave labor of Germans, a triple slavery for the conquered peoples. There is little doubt that Mr. Hoover meant by his proposal that the United States must move away from the democratic method in the direction of the Nazi slave system. The fact that he calls it “economics,” an inoffensive word, to cover up its offensive meaning, need not blind us to the dangerous implications of such a proposal, its character as a subversion

* See “Part 45, Supplementary Exhibits,” *Hearing before Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate*, January 16, 1939.

of the whole war effort of the American nation, its sabotage of victory. Or, for a further example, we can note the tendency represented by Congressman Smith of Virginia (with perhaps a majority of Congress) to deal with labor in the war by means of drastic legislative crippling of the trade union movement—fully in the spirit of Herbert Hoover.

Fortunately for the prospects of victory and a short war, President Roosevelt has not surrendered to these forces or their ideas. It is possible to proceed in the democratic way in the hammering out of our national policy for victory.

Unfortunately for the prospects of victory and a short war, our national thinking as reflected in the newspapers is in the most chaotic, contradictory, confused condition imaginable. Even after the master strategy of the United Nations has been clearly laid down in the Anglo-Soviet-American pacts announced June 11, there is still no general move to revise in harmony with this master plan the thousand minor policies, our daily habits of work, our thoughts and prejudices, all of which are the substance of our national life and effort. Our habits, prejudices, minor policies, still contradict and obstruct our war policy in myriad ways, because they were formed upon the basis of misinformation and lack of knowledge, upon completely false ideas as to who were friends and who enemies, who were strong and who weak. We have corrected the main policy, but we have not begun to bring everything else in line with it. There is a sharp time-lag in our national thinking.

At the very moment I am writing this page, an interesting example of this time-lag in thinking passes before my eyes as I look over the editorial page of the *New York Times* of July 13. One of the most responsible columnists,

Anne O'Hare McCormick, nonchalantly remarks in the course of an objective analysis of the role of Turkey in the war, that: "*From the outset of hostilities it can be said of the Turks that they recognized the war for what it is, a contest for world empire.*"

Innumerable "slips" of this kind in public thinking reflect the much more important "slips" in policy and action which continue. What all this means, in short, is that while we have officially recognized that "the age of imperialism is ended," we still go on thinking and acting upon the assumption that this war is still "a contest for world empire." We are conducting the Peoples' War of National Liberation in too many respects still as though it were on our side also a war for empire. We too often act on the assumption that the proclaiming of virtuous war aims is all we need to change the character of the war, which continues to be fought with the same methods and policies as before.

The truth to which we must return again and again, which is the central truth for winning the war, is the fact that if we conduct this war as an imperialist war we are already defeated hopelessly. We cannot win this war except by arming and uniting all the peoples to fight for their own freedom and independence. This character of the war is not something which will come as the *result of victory*, but on the contrary *victory will come as the result of fighting this kind of war.*

It is not easy to revise and correct our national prejudices and habits of thought and work so fundamentally.

That is only another way of saying that it is not easy to destroy the Axis and win victory.

If it were an easy problem to solve, it would have been

done before we got around to discussing it. Only the most difficult problems arouse our most sustained and valued efforts.

We know that this problem will be solved, because it must be solved to save the United States and the world from slavery. Necessity is the mother, not only of invention, but of new policies and new thinking for entire nations.

We will make this war as short as possible, bring victory at the earliest moment, by realizing quickly such effective agreement on policies which will unite the mass of American people and all important groupings in enthusiastic effort and sacrifice; which will unite us with our allies and potential allies in solid bonds of mutual confidence and collaboration; which will solve the problems of maximum utilization of United States economy for victory.

That means, in other words, that the speed with which victory comes is directly proportional to the speed with which we transform all our thought, action, policy, to bring it into full harmony with the character of the war as the continuation of the "peoples' revolution," *i.e.*, the Peoples' War of National Liberation.

If we accomplish this but slowly, then we must resign ourselves to a long and disastrous war. If we fail to accomplish it completely, we go down to Nazi slavery.

That, in short, is the nub of the debate on "A Short War or a Long One?"