

# LET'S FACE THE FACTS

No. 14

Address to the Men and Women  
of Canada

BY

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*Chairman, Canadian Section of the Permanent Joint Board of  
Defence of Canada and the United States*

over a national network of  
the Canadian Broadcasting  
Corporation, Sunday night,  
Oct. 20, 1940, at the invita-  
tion of the Director of Public  
Information for Canada

*Text of Colonel O. M. Biggar's address over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation national network Sunday night follows:*

Ladies and gentlemen:

I am going to talk to you about what is called the "direct defence" of North America—its defence against direct attack. That is an aspect of the war which has not been discussed in the talks so far given in this series. We have been thinking chiefly of the battles in defence of the whole British Commonwealth now going on in Europe. Canadians have been taking an active part in these. They have been helping to prevent its ever becoming possible for our enemies to turn their powerful forces directly against us or the other parts of the Empire outside Europe. Once success in Europe has been finally obtained we need no longer worry about a direct attack on this continent. But until then such an attack in some form is possible, and any government would be neglecting its duty if it failed to think about what should be done if the European battles should temporarily go against us.

Now I want first to say something about geography. Few of us, I think, form an accurate mental picture of the geographical relation of North America to Europe and Asia. We are accustomed to think of North America as a continent separated from the others by vast expanses of ocean. That is not really true. Great stretches of sea of course intervene between the closely settled parts of North America and those parts of Europe or Asia from which a direct attack might come. It is over these that we have been used for centuries to travel. But farther north the intervening stretches of sea become narrow. If you look at a map of the northern hemisphere, or, even better, if you look at a globe from the top, you will see the picture more clearly. The two northern corners of the Eurasian continent project like gigantic lobster's claws, and North America lies between their tips. It is almost grasped by them. I say almost, because between Europe and the northeastern corner of

North America the waters connecting the Arctic with the Atlantic Ocean are quite wide. But they are much narrower than the Atlantic itself further south and they are broken into still narrower passages by Iceland and Greenland. As every one knows, the shortest air route across the Atlantic we have used so far is the one between Ireland and Newfoundland. A passage further north would involve even shorter sea passages and it would not require much in the way of scientific advance to make the northern route more attractive. Turning to the west of North America, the Asian lobster's claw is very close. The two continents are separated only by the narrow Bering Strait. The sea passage across that Strait is the only one you need make if you take the shortest route between New York and Tokyo. The shortest line between those two cities does not pass over any part of the Pacific Ocean, a fact which you can easily verify, as I have done, by stretching a string over a globe with one end at Tokyo and the other at New York. I remember that soon after the Canadian Air Board was set up more than twenty years ago a genius, or a visionary, I do not know which he was, came to me with plans contemplating the use of this line for commercial air services. He was before his time. But when we have peace again it is quite possible that his idea may be quickly realized.

#### INTEREST IS BILATERAL

The comparative nearness of Europe and Asia to the northeastern and northwestern corners of North America has had the curious result that each of these corners is politically separate from the adjoining territory. On the northeast Newfoundland, now including much of the adjoining mainland, has no political connection with Canada except that both are parts of the British Empire. Alaska on the northwest is an outlying part of the United States, separated from it by some four hundred miles of Canadian territory. It follows that Canada has an obvious interest in the defence of Alaska, and as we shall

see both Canada and the United States have an interest in the defence of Newfoundland.

Until the development of air power the situation was a comparatively simple one. Canada relied for its defence against direct attack chiefly upon the British Navy. And subject to certain qualifications that was also true of the United States. For a long time the strength as well as the disposition of United States naval forces has been based upon British command of the Atlantic. Even today that remains largely true. It will be a good many months before the United States can regard its sea forces as adequate for the complete protection of its own coasts independently of the British Navy. A two-ocean fleet is under construction, but big ships are not built in a day.

#### AIR POWER ALTERS PICTURE

Before the development of air power, defending land forces, if they were adequate, could surround any enemy forces which succeeded in making a landing. The enemy could be prevented from doing any very great harm. That is no longer true. Now if an enemy succeeded in establishing air bases on any part of the North American continent no defending force could count on preventing his aircraft from carrying death and destruction over a wide area.

From the point of view of defence, therefore, Canada's interest in the defence of Newfoundland and Alaska has become very direct and intense. For the same reason the United States is much more concerned than it need formerly have been in taking steps to ensure against the hostile occupation of any part of either Canada or Newfoundland. It was inevitable that the increase in the range, speed and dependability of aircraft should bring about a change in the relations of the United States and Canada. Hitler's attack upon the European system was merely the particular event which led to joint political action. Canada and the United States, for their mutual advantage, had to become even more closely mixed up together (to use Mr. Churchill's phrase) than the United States and the British Empire generally.



When two countries have a common interest in the defence of their respective territories the only common-sense course is for them to study their problems together. That was done by Great Britain and France before 1914, but it was done secretly. It may or may not have then been adequately done as between Belgium and the other two countries. But before 1939 it was certainly not done by Belgium. It was equally not done at that time by either Holland or Norway. The result of its not being done has been catastrophic for each of these three countries.

### SOLUTION IS COMPLEX

You cannot suddenly solve problems of common defence. All the possible dangers from enemy operations must be very carefully studied before there can be effective common action. The governments of the countries concerned must reach agreement as to the responsibilities each is to assume and these responsibilities must be carefully defined. Each government must be satisfied that the other is capable of carrying out the task allotted to it. There must be an understanding about the way the forces of each are to be reinforced by those of the other. Troop movements must be co-ordinated; the capacity of the available transportation facilities taken into account; methods of communication between the forces of each country arranged, and points with regard to supply and the like worked out in detail. In addition to all this you have to provide for elasticity in the plans. You must provide for their modification from time to time as events require. All this takes time, indeed it takes a long time. It is disastrous to leave plans for joint or concerted action by two countries to be improvised in the face of enemy pressure. Recent events have conclusively proved that.

The arrangement made by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister at Ogdensburg meets all the necessities of the situation. As its name implies, the Permanent Joint Board on Defence is permanent. It is to work continuously. It must con-

tinually consider what are the dangers of direct attack upon this continent; what are the steps that should be taken to meet those dangers; which of these are to be taken independently by each government in advance of actual attack; and what the two governments are to do jointly if and when an actual attack is made. The constitution of the Board thus provides the elasticity required, and its personnel has been so selected as to ensure that all the factors of the situation will be taken into consideration.

### MAKE-UP OF BOARD

The majority of the Board's members are officers of the military staffs of the two countries. Canada has three; one from the army, one from the navy and one from the air force. Owing to the different constitution of its forces, the United States has four; two from the army and two from the navy. It has no independent air force, but one of the United States army members and one of its naval members is drawn from the air arm. The two secretaries are members of the diplomatic service of their respective countries. The United States secretary is selected from the State Department and the Canadian from the Department of External Affairs. The Chairmen are the only members taken from outside government service either civil or military. Their primary functions are to assist in ensuring that a broad view is taken, and, I might add, to submit to being constantly photographed. That is one of their most onerous duties. Mayor LaGuardia continues to administer the City of New York and I continue to pursue my less significant activities. In the future the Board will also have the assistance of a distinguished French-speaking Canadian whose recent appointment, following his withdrawal as Minister to France, makes the Canadian section of the Board equal in number to that of the United States.

### NO OBLIGATION ENTAILED

The setting up of the Board imposes no obligation on either country. The Board's function is

to study the problems which arise and to report from time to time to the two governments the steps it thinks should be taken. Some of these steps relate to things which have to be done by each government in advance of actual attack, so that if one is made the necessary facilities will be available to meet it. These steps are no less important than those others which relate to the carrying out of joint or concerted operations by the forces of the two countries together, if and when these are directed.

If the Board makes any recommendation which does not meet with the approval of either government the question of the necessity or advisability of that step will no doubt be referred back to the Board for further consideration. Circumstances, too, may change. Suggestions previously made and approved by both governments may need to be revised. With the problems under continuous study and the Board's recommendations subject to continuous revision, everything which can be done in advance for the protection of both countries against direct attack, has been done.

Nothing need be proposed which in any way affects the territory of either country. There can be no question of the occupation of any bases in Canada by United States forces or any movement into Canada of such forces until an emergency makes their presence necessary. In the same way there can be no question of the occupation of any United States bases by Canadian forces or the movement of any Canadian forces into the United States until an attack has been made and joint or concerted operations have been ordered.

### EMPIRE STATUS UNIMPAIRED

There is nothing in all of this which need detract in the slightest degree from the support which Canada can furnish to Great Britain in carrying on the battles overseas. Nor is there anything which need detract from the assistance which the United States has been and is giving in order,



as President Roosevelt recently said, to resist the "forces of evil which are bent upon the conquest of the world and will destroy whomever and whenever they can destroy." Indeed, the activities of the Board make it possible to strengthen in some degree that support and assistance. Once joint measures of defence have been agreed upon Canada will know that she will not be left alone even for a day to resist an attack upon her coasts. She can view with a quiet mind the despatch overseas of her troops, her aircraft and ships and the munitions which she is making.

History affords numerous instances of the emergence of evil forces. These forces have sometimes been temporarily victorious. They have been successfully overthrown only when they have been resisted with unconquerable steadfastness and courage. We cannot be sure that we understand fully what the Greeks thought of the Persians or what were the feelings of Europeans under attack by the Arabs or the Tartars or the Turks. No doubt they had a low opinion of their enemies but they could hardly have thought the worst of them to be as wholly evil as the three dictators who are now threatening the civilizations of Europe and Asia and have dared the United States to intervene against them. Some, though not all, of these attacks on European civilization have been made by men who imagined themselves to be fulfilling the will of God; but on no previous occasion, so far as I know, has the principal leader of the attackers expressly and publicly announced to his own people that for truth he substituted the lie; for honesty, dishonesty; and for jus-

tice, injustice, violence and torture. A sober and reputable English weekly recently referred to the appointment by Hitler of a new Governor of Slovakia, and pointed out that he was distinguished by his authorship of a treatise on the methods of torturing prisoners. And Mr. André Maurois, in his recent book, has a story of a German naval captain who was picked up by a destroyer after his ship had been sunk. He was offered the use of the destroyer captain's own cabin but could not believe that the offer was honestly made. When he was at last convinced, tears came into his eyes and he said: "I am sorry for you lads, you have no idea what you are fighting against."

#### THE NEED FOR DEFENCE

It seems at first sight beyond belief that any nation should fall under the direction of men so wholly without morals, so wholly without a guiding principle except a selfish desire for power, and so wholly cynical. But if the scale is reduced belief becomes rather easier. Try to imagine the reality behind the accounts you have read of lawless gangs in cities even on this continent. Those accounts are not just stories, the gangs are real. Many of the worst of them have been composed of men who deliberately choose a life outside the law and stop at no crime, however vile, to secure and extend their power. They muscle in on peaceable men's affairs as Hitler has muscled in on the affairs of Germany. When they have seized power, just as he has seized it, they exercise it with the same ruthlessness. They murder those who oppose them and compel, by terror, the acquiescence of men who in their

hearts hate the system imposed upon them. On this continent the gangs have been largely suppressed by the combined efforts of men of good will who have taken an active and public part in the enforcement of the law. Law and its enforcement are just as important in the international as in the municipal or national fields. But it is just as true in the international, as in the national and municipal fields, that men of good will should take precautions to defend their homes—altogether apart from their activity in public affairs. We in Canada are devoting our whole power to checking the lawless international criminal. Many United States citizens are urging that the United States should take an even greater part than it is now doing. That we can well leave for the decision of the people of that country, remaining thankful for the generous assistance already given. But whatever their decision may be there is no reason why both Canada and the United States should not take precautions to meet a direct attack upon this continent, just as the householder in a city in which gangs are active may take the precaution to put a chain on his front door so that no intruder can easily get in. We need chains on the eastern and western doors of North America to prevent our being surprised by the international gangster and to keep him out. Canada and the United States share these doors. They must co-operate to make them secure. It is the task of the Permanent Joint Board on Defence to consider how the material available for door chains in the two countries can best be used, and to make recommendations to the two governments accordingly.

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you pass it to a friend.*