



AMERICA AND THE WORLD

Zimmermann Telegram – 1917

Introduction: As the bloody stalemate of World War I continued into 1917, it appeared that only American manpower could break it. For nearly three years President Woodrow Wilson maintained strict U.S. neutrality, but the intensifying battle between British convoys and German submarines in the Atlantic was putting American ships at risk. The Germans wanted to starve England into submission; as long as American vessels were delivering food to the beleaguered British, that strategy was compromised. By February 1917 the Germans had decided to wage unrestricted submarine warfare on the Atlantic, meaning they would target all ships bound for England regardless of what flag they were sailing under. Anticipating this might goad the U.S. into declaring war, Arthur Zimmermann, the German Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, sent this telegram to his ambassador in Mexico. It was an offer to help the Mexican government reclaim its lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona if they came into the war on the German side. The British Secret Service intercepted this telegram and sent a copy to the Americans. Once its authenticity was verified, Wilson was outraged that Germany would conspire with another government to seize U.S. territory. The Zimmermann Telegram, along with the onset of Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare campaign, convinced the president that American neutrality was no longer possible. On April 16, 1917, Wilson asked for and received from Congress a declaration of war against Germany.

TELEGRAM RECEIVED.

MAILED
October 1-8-58
Harrison, State Dept.

By *Wm. A. Eckhoff*
Date *Oct. 27, 1958*

FROM 2nd from London # 5747.

"We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, ~~write~~ ^{invite} Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace." Signed, ZIEGLER.