

Arthur Zimmermann's Speech Regarding the Zimmermann Telegram *29 March 1917*

After news of the Zimmerman Telegram reached the public, Arthur Zimmerman made the following comments in defence of his proposal to Mexico. His response only served to further anger the American public, however, because until then the majority of Americans doubted the authenticity of the telegram.

I wrote no letter to General Carranza. I was not so naive. I merely addressed, by a route that appeared to me to be a safe one, instructions to our representative in Mexico.

It is being investigated how these instructions fell into the hands of the American authorities. I instructed the Minister to Mexico, in the event of war with the United States, to propose a German alliance to Mexico, and simultaneously to suggest that Japan join the alliance.

I declared expressly that, despite the submarine war, we hoped that America would maintain neutrality.

My instructions were to be carried out only after the United States declared war and a state of war supervened. I believe the instructions were absolutely loyal as regards the United States.

General Carranza would have heard nothing of it up to the present if the United States had not published the instructions which came into its hands in a way which was not unobjectionable. Our behaviour contrasts considerably with the behaviour of the Washington Government.

President Wilson after our note of January 31, 1917, which avoided all aggressiveness in tone, deemed it proper immediately to break off relations with extraordinary roughness. Our Ambassador no longer had the opportunity to explain or elucidate our attitude orally.

The United States Government thus declined to negotiate with us. On the other hand, it addressed itself immediately to all the neutral powers to induce them to join the United States and break with us.

Every unprejudiced person must see in this the hostile attitude of the American Government, which seemed to consider it right, before being at war with us, to set the entire world against us. It cannot deny us the right to seek allies when it has itself practically declared war on us.

Herr Haase [note: a German socialist] says that it caused great indignation in America. Of course, in the first instance, the affair was employed as an incitement against us. But the storm abated slowly and the calm and sensible politicians, and also the great mass of the American people, saw that there was nothing to object to in these instructions in themselves. I refer especially to the statements of Senator Underwood. Even at times newspapers felt obliged to admit regretfully that not so very much had been made out of this affair.

The Government was reproached for thinking just of Mexico and Japan. First of all, Mexico was a neighbouring State to America. If we wanted allies against America, Mexico would be the first to come into consideration. The relations between Mexico and ourselves since

the time of Porfirio Diaz have been extremely friendly and trustful. The Mexicans, moreover, are known as good and efficient soldiers.

It can hardly be said that the relations between the United States and Mexico had been friendly and trustful.

But the world knows that antagonism exists between America and Japan. I maintain that these antagonisms are stronger than those which, despite the war, exist between Germany and Japan.

When I also wished to persuade Carranza that Japan should join the alliance there was nothing extraordinary in this. The relations between Japan and Mexico are long existent. The Mexicans and Japanese are of a like race and good relations exist between both countries.

When, further, the Entente press affirms that it is shameless to take away allies, such reproach must have a peculiar effect coming from powers who, like our enemies, made no scruple in taking away from us two powers and peoples with whom we were bound by treaties for more than thirty years.

The powers who desire to make pliant an old European country of culture like Greece by unparalleled and violent means cannot raise such a reproach against us.

When I thought of this alliance with Mexico and Japan I allowed myself to be guided by the consideration that our brave troops already have to fight against a superior force of enemies, and my duty is, as far as possible, to keep further enemies away from them. That Mexico and Japan suited that purpose even Herr Haase will not deny.

Thus, I considered it a patriotic duty to release those instructions, and I hold to the standpoint that I acted rightly.

Source: *Source Records of the Great War, Vol. V*, ed. Charles F. Horne, *National Alumni 1923*