

= Welles Declaration =

The Welles Declaration was a diplomatic statement issued on July 23, 1940 by Sumner Welles, the United States' acting Secretary of State, condemning the June 1940 occupation by the Soviet Union of the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and refusing to recognize their annexation as Soviet Republics. It was an application of the 1932 Stimson Doctrine of non-recognition of international territorial changes that were executed by force. It was consistent with U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's attitude towards territorial expansion.

The Soviet invasion was an implementation of its 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany, which contained a secret protocol by which the two powers agreed to partition and annex the independent states between them. After the pact, the Soviets engaged in a series of ultimatums and actions ending in the annexation of the Baltic states during the summer of 1940. While the area held little strategic importance to the United States, several legations of the U.S. State Department established diplomatic relationships there. The United States and Britain anticipated future involvement in the war, but U.S. isolationism and a foreseeable British-Soviet alliance deterred open confrontation over the Baltics. Welles, concerned with postwar border planning, had been authorized by Roosevelt to issue stronger public statements gauging a move towards more intervention. Loy Henderson and other State Department officials familiar with the area kept the administration informed of developments there, and Henderson, Welles, and Roosevelt worked together to compose the declaration.

The Welles Declaration established a five-year non-recognition of the Baltic states' annexation. The document had major significance for overall U.S. policy toward Europe in the critical year of 1940. While the U.S. did not engage the Soviet Union militarily in the region, the Declaration enabled the Baltic states to maintain independent diplomatic missions, and Executive Order 8484 protected Baltic financial assets. Its essence was supported by all subsequent U.S. presidents and Congressional resolutions. The Baltic states re-established their independence in 1990-91.

= Background =

== 19th and early 20th century status ==

In the late 18th into the early 20th Century, the Russian Empire annexed the regions that now comprise the three Baltic States as well as Finland. Their national awareness movements began to gain strength, and each declared itself independent in the wake of World War I. All of the States were recognized by the League of Nations during the early 1920s. The Estonian Age of Awakening, the Latvian National Awakening, and the Lithuanian National Revival expressed the peoples' wishes to create independent states. After World War I the three states declared their independence: Lithuania re-established its independence on February 16, 1918, Estonia on February 24, 1918 and Latvia on November 18, 1918. The Baltic countries often were seen as a unified group, despite dissimilarities in their languages and histories. Lithuania was recognized as a state in 1253, Estonia and Latvia emerged from territories held by the Livonian Confederation (established 1243). All three states were admitted into the League of Nations in 1921.

The U.S. had granted full de jure recognition to all three Baltic states by July 1922. The recognitions were granted during the shift from the Democratic administration of Woodrow Wilson to the Republican administration of Warren Harding. While the U.S. did not sponsor any meaningful political or economic initiatives in the region during the interwar period, and its administrations did not consider the states strategically important, it maintained normal diplomatic relations with the states.

The U.S. had suffered over 100,000 deaths during World War I and pursued an isolationist policy, determined to avoid involvement in any further European conflicts. In 1932, however, Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson formally criticised the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria,

and the resulting Stimson Doctrine would go on to serve as a basis for the Welles declaration .

= = = Outbreak of World War II = = =

The situation changed after the outbreak of World War II . Poland was invaded in September 1939 . Great Britain became involved , and a series of German victories in Denmark , Norway , and the Netherlands during spring 1940 were alarming . Britain was clearly threatened and its leadership discussed the possibility of an alliance with the Soviet Union . Under the circumstances , direct British confrontation over the Baltic issue was difficult .

Roosevelt did not wish to lead the U.S. into the war ; his 1937 Quarantine Speech denouncing aggression by Italy and Japan had met mixed responses . Welles felt freer in this regard , looking towards postwar border issues and the establishment of a U.S.-led international body that could intervene in such disputes . Roosevelt saw Welles 's stronger public statements as experiments that would test the public mood in regard to U.S. foreign policy .

The secret protocol contained in the 1939 Molotov - Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union had relegated Estonia , Latvia , and Lithuania to the Soviet sphere of influence . During the course of late 1939 and early 1940 , the Soviet Union issued a series of ultimatums to the Baltic governments that eventually led to the illegal annexation of the states . (At about the same time , the Soviet Union was exerting similar pressure on Finland .) About 30 @, @ 000 Soviet troops entered the Baltic states during June 1940 , followed by arrests of their leaders and citizens .

Elections to " People 's Assemblies " were held in all three states in mid @-@ July ; the Soviet @-@ sponsored slates received between 92 @. @ 2 % and 99 @. @ 2 % of the vote . During June , John Cooper Wiley of the State Department sent coded telegrams to Washington reporting developments in the Baltics , and these reports influenced Welles . The U.S. responded with a July 15 amendment to Executive Order 8389 that froze the assets of the Baltic states , thereby grouping them with German @-@ occupied countries , and by issuing the condemnatory Welles declaration .

= = Formulation = =

The Welles Declaration was written by Loy W. Henderson in consultation with Welles and Roosevelt . Welles would go on to participate in the creation of the Atlantic Charter , which stated that territorial adjustments should be made in accordance with the wishes of the peoples concerned . He increasingly served as acting Secretary of State during Cordell Hull 's illnesses . Henderson , then the State Department 's Director of the Office of European Affairs , was married to a Latvian woman . He had opened an American Red Cross office in Kaunas , Lithuania after World War I and served in the Eastern European Division of the State Department for 18 years .

In a conversation on the morning of July 23 , Welles asked Henderson to prepare a press release " expressing sympathy for the people of the Baltic States and condemnation of the Soviet action . " After reviewing the statement 's initial draft , Welles emphatically expressed his opinion that it was not strong enough . In the presence of Henderson , Welles called Roosevelt and read the draft to him . Roosevelt and Welles agreed that it needed strengthening . Welles then reformulated several sentences and added others which apparently had been suggested by the President . According to Henderson , " President Roosevelt was indignant at the manner in which the Soviet Union annexed the Baltic States and personally approved the condemnatory statement issued by Under Secretary Welles on the subject . " The declaration was made public , and telegraphed to the American Embassy in Moscow , later in the day .

= = Text of declaration = =

The statement read :

During these past few days the devious processes whereunder the political independence and territorial integrity of the three small Baltic Republics ? Estonia , Latvia , and Lithuania ? were to be deliberately annihilated by one of their more powerful neighbors , have been rapidly drawing to their

conclusion .

From the day when the peoples of those Republics first gained their independent and democratic form of government the people of the United States have watched their admirable progress in self @-@ government with deep and sympathetic interest .

The policy of this Government is universally known . The people of the United States are opposed to predatory activities no matter whether they are carried on by the use of force or by the threat of force . They are likewise opposed to any form of intervention on the part of one state , however powerful , in the domestic concerns of any other sovereign state , however weak .

These principles constitute the very foundations upon which the existing relationship between the twenty @-@ one sovereign republics of the New World rests .

The United States will continue to stand by these principles , because of the conviction of the American people that unless the doctrine in which these principles are inherent once again governs the relations between nations , the rule of reason , of justice and of law ? in other words , the basis of modern civilization itself ? cannot be preserved .

= = Impact = =

= = = Impact during World War II = = =

Welles also announced that the U.S. government would continue to recognize the foreign ministers of the Baltic countries as the envoys of sovereign governments . At the same time , the Department of State instructed U.S. representatives to withdraw from the Baltic states for " consultations " . In 1940 The New York Times described the Welles Declaration as " one of the most exceptional diplomatic documents issued by the Department of State in many years . "

The Declaration was a source of contention during the subsequent alliance between the U.S. , Great Britain , and the USSR , but Welles persistently defended it . In a discussion with the media he asserted that the USSR had maneuvered to give " an odor of legality to acts of aggression for purposes of the record " . In a memorandum describing his conversations with British Ambassador Lord Halifax in 1942 , Welles stated that he would have preferred to characterize the plebiscites supporting the annexations as " faked " . In April 1942 he wrote that the annexation was " ... not only indefensible from every moral standpoint , but likewise extraordinarily stupid , " interpreting any concession in the Baltic issue as a precedent that would lead to further border struggles in eastern Poland and elsewhere .

As the war intensified , Roosevelt accepted the need for Soviet assistance and was reluctant to address postwar territorial conflicts . During the 1943 Tehran Conference , he " jokingly " assured Stalin that when Soviet forces reoccupied Baltic countries , " he did not intend to go to war with the Soviet Union on this point . " But , he explained , " the question of referendum and the right of self @-@ determination " would constitute a matter of great importance for the U.S. Despite his work with Soviet representatives in the early 1940s to forward the alliance , Welles saw Roosevelt 's and Churchill 's lack of commitment as dangerous .

= = = Postwar impact = = =

The Welles Declaration linked U.S. policy towards the Baltic states with the Stimson Doctrine , which did not recognize Japanese , German and Italian occupations during the 1930s . It broke with Wilsonian policies that had supported a strong Russian presence as a counterweight to German power . During the Cold War , the U.S. used the Baltic issue as a point of leverage in U.S.-Soviet relations .

Sir Hersch Lauterpacht , a judge of international law , described the basis of the non @-@ recognition doctrine as being founded on the principles of *ex injuria jus non oritur* :

This construction of non @-@ recognition is based on the view that acts contrary to international law are invalid and cannot become a source of legal rights for the wrongdoer . That view applies to

international law one of ' the general principles of law recognized by civilized nation . ' The principle *ex injuria jus non oritur* is one of the fundamental maxims of jurisprudence . An illegality cannot , as a rule , become a source of legal right to the wrongdoer .

Like the Stimson Doctrine , Welles ' declaration was largely symbolic in nature , although it offered some material benefits in conjunction with Executive Order 8484 . It enabled the diplomatic representatives of the Baltic states in various other countries to fund their operations and protected the ownership of ships flying Baltic flags . By establishing a non @-@ recognition policy , it allowed some 120 @, @ 000 postwar displaced persons from the Baltic states to avoid repatriation to the Soviet Union and advocate independence from abroad .

The U.S. position that the Baltic states had been forcibly annexed would remain its official stance for the following 51 years . Subsequent U.S. presidents and Congressional resolutions reaffirmed the substance of the Declaration . President Dwight D. Eisenhower asserted the right of the Baltic states to independence in an address to the United States Congress on January 6 , 1957 . After confirming the Helsinki Final Act in July 1975 , the United States House of Representatives passed a resolution that the Final Act would not affect the continuity of U.S. recognition of the sovereignty of Baltic states .

On July 26 , 1983 , on the 61st anniversary of *de jure* recognition of the three Baltic countries by the U.S. in 1922 , President Ronald Reagan re @-@ declared the United States ' recognition of the independence of Estonia , Latvia and Lithuania . The declaration was read in the United Nations as well . Throughout the 51 years that followed the events of 1940 , all U.S. official maps and publications that mentioned the Baltic states included a statement of U.S. non @-@ recognition of Soviet occupation .

The independence movements in the states during the 1980s and 1990 succeeded and the United Nations recognized all three in 1991 . The states went on to become members of the European Union and NATO . Their development since independence is generally regarded as one of the most successful post @-@ Soviet stories .

When commenting on the Declaration 's seventieth anniversary , U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton described it as " a tribute to each of our countries ' commitment to the ideals of freedom and democracy . " On July 23 , 2010 a commemorative plaque inscribed with its text in English and Lithuanian was formally dedicated in Vilnius , the capital of Lithuania .