EUROPE

(Continued from Volume II)

ICELAND

PARTICIPATION OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE DEFENSE OF ICELAND

740.0011 European War 1939/19752: Telegram

The Chargé in Iceland (Barnes) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, February 25, 1942—7 p.m.
[Received February 26—7:27 a.m.]

125. Events in the Pacific, the passage of the German warships through the Dover Straits and the approach of the season when weather and light conditions most favor an attack on this island, have focused the attentions of Icelanders on the question of what may be in store for them. Concern as to how fully developed are the plans for the protection of the island and how adequate are the forces and material here effectively to resist a determined attack is manifest.

Symptomatic of this alarm are statements in the Conservative Party press to the effect that Singapore "fell because of Japanese local air superiority" and alleging that "["] German planes are now more frequently over the Islands than over England itself". The organ of the Communist Party has asked, "who can say that Iceland is a fortress after the fall of Singapore", and its editor, after asking in his newspaper, "what are the measures taken to assure the protection of the island", has requested in the Althing a statement from the Prime Minister as to whether, "in his opinion the agreement concluded for the military defense of the country is being carried out in such a way as to assure the safety of the island in the best possible manner".

Visir, the mouthpiece of the Conservative Minister of Finance, has observed that "with strong fortresses falling everywhere" it is futile for Icelanders "to pretend that we can stand aside from what is occurring; the facts are entirely to the contrary." It therefore behoves Icelanders to stand together in this crisis and thus to strengthen the security of their island, concludes this newspaper.

1 For previous correspondence on the protection of Iceland, see Foreign Relations, 1941, vol. II, pp. 776 ff.
2 Hermann Jonasson.
This question of whether Iceland is adequately defended is not being agitated in the press only. In recent days the question has been put to me by a number of prominent Icelanders, including Jonas Jonsson, who is the power behind the Prime Minister. Jonsson said he frequently asks himself whether the military forces in Iceland are competent to the task he believes inevitably to be before them, and whether, had there been, or were there to be more cooperation between the forces and Icelanders, by virtue of which each would contribute their knowledge and capacities to ward against possible disaster, the safety of the country would be better assured.

During the course of a conversation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs yesterday, I asked whether, in his opinion, I was misreading the straws in the wind that seem to point to a growing apprehension and a consequent stirring of opinion in favor of more forthright acceptance of quietness [sic] as they exist with respect to Iceland's situation in this war. He said that most certainly such signs were present, and that they truly reflect local opinion, which had become disturbed by events in the Pacific and the escape of the German warships. He said he believed that the time had come when Icelanders should participate more in the efforts looking to protection, and when their leaders should be in closer contact with the military and the problem of the safety of the country. He added, most confidentially, that he had recently talked over some of these matters with General Curtis, as he is the senior General here but as this would not long continue to be the case, that he would also apparent omission] to explore the ground with our military and naval commanders.

Much of the foregoing was discussed informally several days ago with the British Minister, and subsequently with General Bonesteel. Both seemed to think that with the return of General Curtis, about a week hence, from an inspection trip of the island, consideration should be given to establishing some means of more direct contact with Icelandic leaders and opinion, it being recognized at the outset, however, that security factors require caution in the matter of how far the forces of occupation may go along this line.

Paraphrase to General Bonesteel and Admiral Kauffman.
REYKJAVIK, March 3, 1942—6 p. m.

[Received March 5—7 a. m.]

134. The Legation is negotiating with the Icelandic Government for the use of land required for the construction of a large airfield urgently called for in the plans for the defense of Iceland. The War Department has now made available the funds for this important installation but has directed that construction not be started until acquisition of all the necessary land has been completed.

The urgency of the matter has been impressed upon the Government, which is now considering ways and means most expeditiously to turn the site over to our military authorities and to meet their requirements with respect to security in a surrounding area of approximately 100 square miles. When discussing these matters with me a few days ago, the Minister for Foreign Affairs raised the question of ownership of the installation after the war. He said that we recognize the principle, as does the British Government, that military installations constructed on land made available by the Government will become the property of the Icelandic State at the end of the war.

The British Minister has informed me that this is accepted by his Government to be the case with respect to the two aerodromes built by the British on land made available by the Government. The British Minister has also informed me of his Government’s recent approach to the Department on the subject of joint American-British negotiations with the Icelandic Government looking to an agreement that would assure most-favored-nation treatment to American and British air companies with respect to the post-war use of airfields constructed in Iceland by the American and British forces. The Minister said that the Department had replied that perhaps the time and circumstances were inopportune for such negotiations as an agreement reached at this time might be criticized as having been negotiated under pressure, but that the matter would be looked into again with Minister MacVeagh upon his arrival in Washington. The Minister urged me to consult with General Bonesteel, and to report our views to the Department, especially if we agree with him that the Icelandic authorities could not take umbrage at such a proposal, and would consider it as only natural under the circumstances.

I have consulted with General Bonesteel and the two of us agree that there is much to be said in favor of the British suggestion, particularly as the Minister for Foreign Affairs has paved the way for

7 American Minister to Iceland, on leave in the United States at this time.
such a proposal by us at the present time by raising the question of the ownership of the projected American airfield at the close of the war. However, General Bonesteel has emphasized the need for speed in constructing this airfield and he has asked that pending the receipt of a reply to this telegram the Legation continue to press for the early completion of the steps necessary to give the army possession of the needed land.

[BARNES]

859A.20/165: Telegram
The Acting Secretary of State to the Chargé in Iceland (Barnes)

WASHINGTON, March 16, 1942—9 p.m.

74. Your 134, March 3, 6 p.m. The question of an agreement with respect to the post-war use of airdromes constructed by our forces in Iceland is receiving consideration. In the meantime, this question should be kept separate in your negotiations with the Icelandic Government from that of the additional land needed by the Army which you are requested to press to the extent desired by General Bonesteel.

WELLES

859A.20/170: Telegram
The Chargé in Iceland (Barnes) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, April 13, 1942—5 p.m.
[Received April 14—1 p.m.]

198. Since the conversation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, referred to in the Legation’s telegram No. 134, March 3, 6 p.m., the question of post-war use of aerodromes constructed by our forces has been avoided in discussions looking to the acquisition of the land required by General Bonesteel. However, a note has now been received from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs stating that the United States military authorities may consider themselves to be “in possession of the ground area” provided the Icelandic Government receives confirmation “of the mutual understanding that the aerodrome in question”, together with buildings and installations, will become the undisputed property of the Icelandic State, without any payment, charge or obligation, upon the conclusion of the present war. The note concludes with the statement that the Minister will be pleased to learn from the Legation whether an agreement in the foregoing sense may be considered to exist.

Because of most important military considerations and as the British accept the principle of reversion with improvements, General Bone-
steel urges that the Legation be instructed with the least possible delay to reply in the affirmative. I believe that our reply should limit reversion with improvements to immovable installations and should not fail to provide for post-war most-favored-nation’s rights for our own interests. A general agreement covering all airdromes would seem preferable to piecemeal handling of the matter. However, General Bonesteel is most anxious that we proceed in the manner best calculated to obviate delay.

Barnes

859A.20/173: Telegram

The Minister in Iceland (MacVeagh) to the Secretary of State

Reykjavik, April 21, 1942—midnight.

[Received April 22—4:31 a.m.]

217. For the Secretary and Under Secretary. The British Commanding General departed this morning and the supreme military command in Iceland passed to General Bonesteel.

In this connection, and following a procedure adopted last year by the British, General Bonesteel has requested me to inform the Icelandic Government secretly that in the event of an attack on this island of a nature sufficiently serious in his judgment to warrant such an action, he will instantly proclaim without further recourse to the civil authorities, the existence of a military government here. For the further secret information of the Icelandic Government he has furnished me with a copy of his proposed proclamation, together with a formidable list of penal laws and penalties taken from the rules of land warfare.

The General states that his proclamation has the full authority of the War Department, to which it was submitted for approval. He also says that he has been definitely instructed to proclaim military government and not simply martial law as was done by the British.

On account of the sweeping nature of his proposals, and the existence of an explicit promise on our part not to interfere with the Government of Iceland while our troops remain in the country, I believe I should take no action on the General’s request without instructions though speed in this matter is obviously desirable. The General tells me that the War Department has a copy of his proclamation and I can forward telegraphically a copy of the briefer British document if so desired. I ascertained in conversation with the Premier today that he would see nothing out of the way in our replacing the latter with a similar one of our own, though it would give our forces control of practically everything in Iceland, but I believe that a proposal on the part of our military to assume the name of the Icelandic Government
under any condition but a request from that Government itself, could only result in ill will and obstruction.

MacVeagh

859A.20/170: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Minister in Iceland (MacVeagh)*

**WASHINGTON, May 1, 1942—5 p.m.**

125. Legation’s 198, April 13, 5 p.m. Department agrees with the suggestion in the last paragraph of your message. This would recognize the right of reversion to immovable installations, and should provide for post-war most-favored-nation’s rights as well as national treatment for our own aviation interests. Reservation should be made of right to discuss the whole question of military and commercial landing rights with the Icelandic Government at the close of the war in the light of conditions as they may then exist. Please report immediately should the Icelandic Government evidence any reluctance to agree to the foregoing as the War Department has stressed the urgent need for the land in question.

Hull

859A.20/173: Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Minister in Iceland (MacVeagh)*

**WASHINGTON, May 2, 1942—3 p.m.**

126. Matter referred to in your 217, April 21, has been laid before the President. Pending his decision, no action should be taken by you on General Bonesteel’s request.

Hull

859A.20/179: Telegram

*The Minister in Iceland (MacVeagh) to the Secretary of State*

**REYKJAVIK, May 6, 1942—1 p.m.**

[Received 8:55 p.m.]

230. Department’s 125, May 1, 5 p.m. On May 4, I handed a note to the Minister for Foreign Affairs stating in substance as follows:

1. The United States Government accepts the principle of reversion “with all immovable installations” without any payments by or charges against the Icelandic State.

2. The United States Government understands that upon reversion United States nationals and aviation interests “will possess unconditional and unrestricted most-favored-nation rights” with respect to the use of the airdrome and also rights equal to those accorded aviation interests and nationals of Iceland.

*Not printed.*
The United States Government understands that the question of United States military and commercial landing rights "in Iceland as a whole" is reserved for discussion after the war in the light of conditions then existing.

In reply, the Minister for Foreign Affairs gave me a note yesterday afternoon, expressing pleasure over our acceptance of the principle of reversion, assuring postwar unconditional and unrestricted most-favored-nation rights to United States nationals and aviation interests with respect to Keflavik air-drome, and stating that the Icelandic Government considers the required agreement to have been reached whereby the American Army may regard itself as in possession of the ground necessary for construction.

The reply adds that the Government considers it "desirable and in the fullest harmony with the agreement entrusting the military protection of Iceland to the United States until the conclusion of the present war, that no future military commitments be entered into in connection with the undertakings of the United States forces in Iceland."

In explanation of this passage, the Minister said that if the United States won the war it would not be possible for Iceland, after the victory, to refuse to discuss the subject of landing rights with us, and indicated that the passage quoted was included as a precautionary statement largely for home consumption.

The note makes no mention of national treatment but the Minister explained that to include it would necessarily involve reference to the Althing and though that body might be induced to consent, if we insisted, the process would inevitably cause further delay to the vital project in hand. He thought that if desired it could be taken up later more usefully.

As the note accepts unconditional and unrestricted most-favored-nation rights, limits reversion to immovable installations and at the same time does not exclude the possibility of later discussions with respect to national treatment and post-war landing rights, I hope that I may be instructed at once to inform the Minister that we consider the agreement satisfactorily concluded.

MACVEAGH

859A.20/173: Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Minister in Iceland (MacVeagh)

WASHINGTON, May 7, 1942—5 p.m.

128. From the Under Secretary. Contents of your 217, April 21, have been laid before the President together with an expression of the Department’s opinion that the establishment of an American

*Not printed.
military government even in the event of a German attack would be contrary to the spirit if not the terms of the President's explicit promise not to interfere with the government of Iceland; that such action would result in ill will on the part of the Icelandic population, and would furnish Germany with excellent propaganda material particularly in the Scandinavian countries; and that foregoing aspects would weigh against any military advantages.

In lieu of the procedure suggested to you by General Bonesteel, the President has now authorized you to discuss with General Bonesteel and with the Icelandic Government the terms of a proclamation to be issued by the Regent of Iceland, or other appropriate Icelandic authority, whenever requested by the United States military commander, under which the Icelandic Government would itself proclaim martial law and delegate to the United States military authorities the full enforcement thereof. If this procedure should be unacceptable to the Icelandic Government for constitutional or other reasons, you are authorized to discuss the possibility of the issuance by the Commanding General, in case of necessity, of a simple proclamation of martial law as appears to have been contemplated by the British military authorities, and to which, according to your telegram under reference, the Prime Minister has already indicated his assent.

The tenor of the procedure authorized by the President and also that of the foregoing instructions to you has been communicated to the Secretary of War together with the suggestion that he may wish to send appropriate directives to General Bonesteel.

You may communicate the contents of this telegram to General Bonesteel and initiate your discussions with the Icelandic Government whenever details have been agreed upon between you and the General. The importance of secrecy and the urgency of an early decision in the matter should be impressed upon any officials with whom this matter is discussed.

The Department should be kept fully informed by telegraph.

[Welles.]

HULL

859A.20/180: Telegram

The Minister in Iceland (MacVeagh) to the Secretary of State

[Extract]

REYKJAVIK, May 9, 1942—2 p.m.
[Received 3:23 p.m.]

234. For the Under Secretary. Department's 128, May 7, 5 p.m. General Bonesteel finds himself still bound by his orders since he has
not been advised in any contrary sense by the War Department. He is now telegraphing urgently for instructions.

MacVeagh

859A.20/179 : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Minister in Iceland (MacVeagh)

WASHINGTON, May 15, 1942—6 p.m.

136. Your 230, May 6, 1 p.m. If it is to be understood that the withholding of national treatment at this time would not render it possible to discriminate against United States interests in favor of other foreign interests, this Government has no objection to omitting specific mention of national treatment in the exchange of notes. In other words this Government does not desire that any situation shall arise which would have the effect of weakening the granting of unconditional most-favored-nation treatment, as for example in a case where a foreign air transport company might be authorized under the laws of Iceland to engage in aviation activities.

With reference to the stipulation that no future military commitments will be entered into in connection with the undertakings of United States forces in Iceland, you may state that there is no objection to this stipulation provided it is clearly understood that the word “future” applies only to the period after the war.

Hull

859A.20/184 : Telegram

The Minister in Iceland (MacVeagh) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, May 19, 1942—11 a.m.
[Received 8:09 p.m.]

259. Department’s 136, May 15, 6 p.m. In a communication\(^\text{10}\) which I handed to the Prime Minister\(^\text{11}\) yesterday morning, I informed him that our exchange of notes might be considered as constituting an agreement provided it is understood (1) that no discrimination against the interests of the United States will be rendered possible by the not granting to its nationals and aviation interests at this time of equal treatment with Icelandic nationals and aviation interests; and (2) that in his stipulation that no future military commitments shall be entered into in connection with the undertakings of the United States military forces here, the word “future” applies only to the period after the war.

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\(^{10}\) Not printed.

\(^{11}\) Olafur Thors was Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Cabinet formed May 16, 1942.
Mr. Thors at once stated verbally, and yesterday afternoon confirmed in writing, that the Icelandic Government's understanding of the above two points conforms with ours as stated, and he has now ordered the issuance of the necessary proclamation establishing the restricted area at Kealvik.

MACVEAGH

859A.20/184a : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Minister to the Norwegian Government in Exile (Biddle), at London

WASHINGTON, May 20, 1942—9 p.m.

Norwegian Series No. 9.

1. War Department recommends that after relief of British forces in Northeast Iceland sector by American troops, the Independent Norwegian Company now stationed at Akureyri under British command be placed under the command of the Commanding General, United States Forces in Iceland, who has taken over the Supreme Command from the British.

2. General Bonesteel, the Commanding General in Iceland, states that the Norwegian Company would be of great assistance in training our troops in winter warfare and in carrying out winter patrol missions in the Akureyri area.

3. You are requested to discuss this matter with the Norwegian authorities, emphasizing the obvious advantages to our common cause of preserving the principle of unity of command in Iceland and asking that arrangements be made to accomplish the end desired by the War Department. We would expect that the Company would continue to be financed by and function generally under the Norwegian Government and that the proposed command arrangements would apply only to the portion of the unit in Iceland and not to the detachment now garrisoning Jan Mayen Island.

HULL

859A.20/185 : Telegram

The Minister to the Norwegian Government in Exile (Biddle) to the Secretary of State

[LONDON, May 22, 1942—9 p.m.]

Norwegian Series No. 9. Norwegian Government accepts in principle proposal contained in your 9, May 20, 9 p.m.

It desires that details of arrangement be embodied in a formal military agreement which it hopes may be concluded at an early date.
Norwegian Government also desires that negotiations regarding these details be carried out in agreement with the British military authorities. This is necessary in order to avoid any conflict with military agreements with the British which regulate strength of Norwegian forces in different areas.

[BIDDLE]

859A.20/199 : Telegram

The Minister to the Norwegian Government in Exile (Biddle) to the Secretary of State

LONDON, June 25, 1942—5 p.m. [Received June 25—11:59 a.m.]

Norwegian Series No. 14. Your 9, May 20, 9 p.m. and my 9 May 22, 9 p.m. Norwegian Government indicates willingness that its original suggestion for a formal military agreement covering arrangement for unified command in Iceland should take the form of an exchange of notes.

Norwegian authorities are still studying certain aspects of this problem. They hope within the next few days to give me their conclusions. I shall then submit to you a tentative draft for a possible exchange of notes.

[BIDDLE]

859A.20/203 : Telegram

The Chargé in Iceland (Warner) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, July 3, 1942—3 p.m. [Received 7 p.m.]

350. Department’s 134, May 14, 11 p.m.12 Final Icelandic text of the proclamation to be issued by the Commanding General in case it becomes necessary for him to exercise full military control by reason of an imminent serious attack and final text of an appeal by the Prime Minister to the Icelandic people in such an event have both now been printed secretly by the Icelandic Government. One hundred fifty copies of each were delivered this morning to General Bonesteel for use in case he should find it necessary to publish the documents. Final texts approved by the Prime Minister, MacVeagh and General Bonesteel vary only in several minor details from drafts furnished by War Department.

Air mail despatch follows.

[WARNER]

12 Not printed.
The Minister to the Norwegian Government in Exile (Biddle) to the Secretary of State

London, July 9, 1942—7 p.m.
[Received 11:47 p.m.]

Norwegian Series No. 16. My 14, June 25, 5 p.m. Following is draft of suggested exchange of notes.

“I have the honor to signify my Government’s agreement to the following arrangements for regulating military relations between the armed forces of the United States and of Norway in Iceland.

Recognizing the advantages of preserving the principle of unity of command in Iceland, it is agreed that since the British forces in Northeast Iceland have been relieved by United States troops, the independent Norwegian company stationed at Akureyri, formerly under British command, shall be placed under the operational control of the Commanding General, United States Army Iceland base.

The Norwegian company shall be placed at the disposal of the United States Commanding General as a Norwegian training unit in winter warfare and for carrying out winter patrol missions in the Akureyri area. However, since the original purpose of the company was to serve as a depot for the Norwegian detachment garrisoning Jan Mayen Island, the United States Commanding General shall make use of the company in such a way that this purpose is fulfilled.

The Norwegian company in Iceland shall be furnished by the Norwegian Government with necessary clothing, equipment and weapons. However, special winter equipment shall be issued by the United States authorities to the extent that the United States commanding officer deems desirable. The United States authorities shall provide the company with rations, quarters and medical service, on the same scale as furnished American forces stationed in Iceland, and also effect repairs to clothes and equipment, insofar as facilities permit. The cost to the United States of all such equipment, supplies and services shall be refunded by the Norwegian Government, which shall also be responsible for the pay of Norwegian personnel. However, transportation essential for the employment of the company by United States military authorities shall be at the expense of the U.S.

The personnel of the Norwegian company shall continue to be subject to Norwegian civil and military jurisdiction and Norwegian disciplinary authority.

The Norwegian Government reserves to itself the right to withdraw this personnel, in whole or in part, if a situation would develop rendering advisable its detail to other tasks.

The foregoing arrangement shall enter into effect as of this date and shall remain in force until either party notifies the other of its desire to terminate or modify it.

Accept, et cetera.”

Foregoing reflects wishes of Norwegian authorities, British have also signified concurrence, it being understood detachment of Jan
Mayen Island remains under British naval control, and draft is also satisfactory to United States Army headquarters here.

With regard to exclusion of Jan Mayen detachment from our operational control, pursuant to final paragraph of your 9, May 20, 9 p. m., I understand early in June General Bonesteel recommended its inclusion and that War Department has recently asked military headquarters here to submit a recommendation on the point. Although latter has not yet submitted its views it sees no objection to going ahead with suggested note.

Norwegian authorities state that in practice, arrangement is already largely in effect and they hope position may be regularized by suggested exchange on [off?] notes.

[BIDDLE]

S59A.00/89: Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Chargé in Iceland (Warner)

WASHINGTON, July 22, 1942—8 p. m.

230. Your despatch no. 137, July 3.¹³ Please make an occasion to call on the Prime Minister and during your conversation with him say in the most friendly way that your Government has learned with regret that certain factions in Iceland seem to be agitating for a premature abrogation of the Act of Union between Denmark and Iceland; that we feel that a unilateral abrogation of the Act by Iceland in a manner contrary to that provided for by the Treaty ¹⁴ itself and while our troops are in the country would be seized upon by the Germans to spread pernicious propaganda, at which they are adept, in Denmark and other Scandinavian countries which might react unfavorably on both Icelandic and American interests; and that accordingly, while we have no desire to interfere in purely internal Icelandic matters, we are confident that the Prime Minister will not take it amiss that we suggest that it would be in the best interests of both countries that any active move at this time towards the unilateral abrogation of the Act be quieted.

Fontenay’s ¹⁵ letter is being transmitted to the Danish Minister who is now out of Washington.

¹³ Not printed.
¹⁴ Treaty of Union of November 30, 1918, between Iceland and Denmark; for text, see British and Foreign State Papers, vol. iii, p. 708.
¹⁵ Frank le Sage de Fontenay, Danish Minister in Iceland.
The Chargé in Iceland (Warner) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, August 8, 1942—3 p. m.
[Received 8:24 p. m.]

409. The Legation's 338 [398], August 1, 2 p. m. 18 The Prime Minister has just handed me a memorandum setting forth his Government's views on the severance of the Union between Iceland and Denmark, the text of which is transmitted in the Legation's telegram No. 410, August 8, 3 p. m. 17 He emphasized again that Iceland does not wish to do anything harmful to the United States and frankly stated that Prime Minister Churchill had previously made a similar suggestion through the late British Minister. Because of the alleged insecurity of his codes he is instructing the Icelandic Minister at Washington to obtain from the Department a copy of "an important message" namely the memorandum. In the connection please see 7 thereof. He hopes that a reply may be received promptly because the new Parliament has convened for only a short period.

WARNER

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The Chargé in Iceland (Warner) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, August 8, 1942—3 p. m.
[Received August 9—8:29 a.m.]

410. Legation's 409, August 8, 3 p. m.

"In the following, reference is made to the friendly message which on the 31st of July last the American Chargé d'Affaires brought to the Prime Minister calling attention to the inconveniences which the United States Government fears that a premature abrogation of the Treaty of Union between Iceland and Denmark might cause and the observations summarized below are made after consultation with the leaders and prominent members of all parties of the Icelandic Parliament, the Althing without exception, who unanimously have declared their agreement:

1. It has never been and is not a desire of the Icelandic people to cause any inconvenience to the United States Government; quite contrary it is their desire that the friendly collaboration may continue intact as hitherto.

2. It is understood that the expression premature abrogation is intended to imply an abrogation taking effect before 1944 as from that time the treaty expressly provides for unilateral abrogation of the..."
Union. On that point there has never existed any disagreement between Icelanders or Danes or others as in fact the wording of the treaty cannot be disputed.

3. Long before the present war the Icelandic Parliament had twice declared unanimously that the provisions in question would be materialized by Iceland, namely that the Union would be abrogated immediately after the end of the year 1943. This is known by the Danish nation, by the other Scandinavian peoples and others who take interest in Icelandic affairs. This, therefore, must have been expected.

4. The decision of having the Union abrogated concurrently with the establishment of the Republic of Iceland is seconded not only by all parties of the Althing but also by members of the Althing without exception—no [not?], only by certain factions—and, it is believed, by a great majority of the Icelandic people. This will be established by a vote of the people which will be arranged before this matter is brought to an end.

5. The attention is called to [fact?] that on the 17th of May 1941 the Althing declared unanimously that it considered that Iceland had acquired the right to abrogate entirely the Union Act with Denmark and that it was the Althing’s will as soon as the Union with Denmark has been abrogated in the formal sense. Those decisions had therefore been taken and made public before the United States of America assuming the military protection of Iceland was raised. The same declarations were formally notified to Danish Government through official channels.

6. The right to abrogate the Union now is founded on the opinion of Icelandic scholars which they consider in accordance with opinions generally held by scholars in international law that an abrogation of a treaty is justified if either party does not fulfill essential obligations. But since the 9th of April 1940 the Danes, as known, have been unable to fulfill their obligations according to the treaty with the result that the treaty can be considered as non-existent when a declaration to that effect is given by Iceland. This harmonizes with the fundamental rights of a recognized sovereign people to decide alone their constitutional form.

7. In case further information is desired in Iceland and further facts or explanations, it is suggested that the Icelandic Minister in Washington be consulted. It is desired that a copy of this communication be handed over to him.

8. It is further mentioned that the Althing will declare that Danish citizens shall enjoy in full their rights according to the Union Treaty until conditions have made possible to negotiate a treaty for the two nations future relations, although the Danes have been and still are unable to fulfill their Union Treaty obligations.
9. The Icelandic Government have, soonest after the Althing in June 1942 had decided to set up a committee for preparing for the Parliament now having been summoned a draft for a new constitution, taken steps to inform His Majesty the King and the Danish Government of the development described above. However, it is still unconfirmed that a report on the matter forwarded some 6 weeks ago has arrived at its destination. In any case, the report had not been received a week ago.

10. The present Icelandic Government have publicly declared their intention to undertake to have this matter brought to an end in the current year. The waiving of this decision, therefore, would have to be publicly explained and obviously such an explanation might provide material for certain propaganda.

11. It is earnestly hoped that the United States Government will give the above rendered explanations the same friendly consideration as we on our part will be willing to consider what further the United States Government might wish to submit to us. However, considering that the Althing will have a short sitting this time, it will be necessary to take the matter up for deliberation very shortly.[*]

WARNER

859A.00/102: Telegram

The Chargé in Iceland (Warner) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, August 15, 1942—noon.
[Received 6:04 p.m.]

419. Legation’s 409, August 8, 3 p.m. The Prime Minister has again solicited the good offices of the Legation with a view to expediting the receipt of any observations which the Department may care to make and which he is most anxious to have at the earliest possible moment because of the short parliamentary session. For the Department’s information the question of the immediate severance of the union before the expiration of the treaty appears in no way to be a vital or pressing popular issue but since each party has publicly come out for it no one alone can afford politically to change its declared position.

WARNER

859A.00/104: Telegram

The Chargé in Iceland (Warner) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, August 18, 1942—6 p.m.
[Received August 18—6 p.m.]

422. Legation’s 419, August 15, noon, and 409, August 8, 3 p.m. The Prime Minister has personally handed me a signed note to the
effect that if no reply is forthcoming by noon on Saturday August 22 to
the Icelandic Government’s memorandum of August 8, his Government “shall consider” that the United States Government does not de-
sire to make any further observations with respect to the “decision
made by Iceland” to declare the Treaty of Union between Iceland and
Denmark nonexistent and to establish distinctly a Republic of Iceland.
Mr. Thors explained orally that all matters before the new Parliament
are now being wound up and in view “decision” and the necessity of
making the present session a short one some definite action must be
taken in this matter.

Warner

859A.00/102 : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Chargé in Iceland (Warner)

Washington, August 18, 1942—9 p. m.

268. Your 419, August 15.

1. Please deliver to the Prime Minister in a formal note the sub-
stance of the following observations:

The Government of the United States has carefully studied the
Prime Minister’s memorandum setting forth the Icelandic point of
view with regard to the early unilateral termination of the Union and
treaty between Iceland and Denmark.

The Government of the United States recognizes that in normal
times the abrogation of the Union and the treaty and the proposed
change in the fundamental political organization of the Icelandic
State would be matters to be decided by the Icelandic peoples in ac-
cordance with their own needs and aspirations.

The Government of the United States has no desire to interfere in
the slightest degree with the freedom of action of the Icelandic people
in these respects, but it is desirous that no action should be taken
during these troublous times that might interfere with the general war
effort of the United Nations, on the outcome of which so greatly de-
pends the future welfare and independence of Iceland and of the
United States as well as of other nations and peoples. This Govern-
ment holds the view that the common interest in the successful prose-
cution of the war would be best served if the status quo were main-
tained in Iceland for the time being. This would avoid the possible
charge that Iceland had taken advantage of the present unfortunate
position of Denmark. It would also avoid the further untruthful
charge that the United States had taken advantage of the situation of
Denmark and of the presence of United States military forces in
Iceland to promote the abrogation movement. Our two Governments
know that United States has had nothing whatsoever to do with the
proposed action by Iceland, but other governments and peoples would
be told by the Axis powers that this was the work of the United States.

Accordingly the Government of the United States repeats the sugges-
tion that in the best interests of both Iceland and the United States
and of general world order and understanding the abrogation question be postponed until a more favorable occasion.

2. Close paraphrase of text of Icelandic memorandum transmitted in your 410, August 8, has been handed to the Icelandic Minister as requested in your 409.

Hull

859A.20/213: Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Minister to the Norwegian Government in Exile (Biddle), at London

WASHINGTON, August 26, 1942—8 p.m.

Norwegian Series No. 15. Your 17. 

War Department approves draft exchange of notes as telegraphed in your no. 16 and recommends that agreement be consummated as soon as possible. Accordingly, you are authorized to proceed with exchange of notes acting under instructions of your Government”.

Texts of notes as signed should be sent to Department by air mail.

Hull

859A.00/107: Telegram

The Chargé in Iceland (Warner) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, September 8, 1942—4 p. m.

[Received 8:42 p.m.]

463. Legation’s 429, August 20, 4 p. m.

Yesterday the Government introduced a bill to amend the constitution to provide that when Parliament approves the severance of the Union with Denmark and the creation of a republic such parliamentary action with subsequent approval by popular referendum shall take effect as fundamental law, namely as a constitutional amendment. The text of the bill as introduced is quoted in the Legation’s telegram 464 of September 8, 4 p. m. The bill immediately passed all three readings in the lower house and was sent to the upper house with an amendment specifying that this exceptional method of effecting a constitutional amendment shall be limited to questions connected with the severance of the Union and the resultant change from a monarchy to a republic.

The bill was passed by a majority approved before Parliament dissolves within the next few days and must be passed again, as required

18 Dated August 13, 11 p. m.; not printed.
19 The notes exchanged between Minister Biddle and Mr. Lie, the Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs, on August 28 were the same as draft quoted in Norwegian Series telegram No. 16, July 9, 7 p. m., p. 12. For final text of notes, see Department of State Executive Agreement Series No. 497, or 59 Stat. (pt. 2) 1819.
20 Not printed.
by the constitutional, by the requirement resulting from the general elections now tentatively set for October 18 which will be held under the new electoral law. The procedure provided for in the bill will make it unnecessary to dissolve Parliament and to [apparent omission] modifications in later whenever Parliament should decide to sever the Union (Legation’s 398, August 1, 9 p. m. 22) but does require a referendum in place thereof.

The result of the Government’s action is that no concrete steps will be taken toward the severance of relations at this session as promised but all action is now deferred until such time as the new Parliament may deem the matter expedient.

The Prime Minister is [in?] introducing the bill referred to the Parliamentary gentleman named last spring to draft amendments for the establishment of a republic which proposal was to have been acted upon at the present session saying that the work of the committee had collapsed because “a new and unexpected turn was given to the course of the independence aspirations of the nation”. The Government’s bill received the support not only of the Conservative Party (with the exception of the member Petur Ottesen) but also of the Social Democrats and Communists both of whom spoke in its behalf. The Progressives took the opportunity to attack Government and its supporting parties alleging that it had used the independence question to gain advantage in the July 5 election and had now broken its promises to settle the question. The Progressives and Ottesen, however, did not vote against it but merely voted present. Ottesen in disapproving a postponement of the independence question declared openly “The military [apparent omission] to which we have entrusted the defence of the country has requested that the matter be deferred”.

Despatch follows.

WALTER

892A.60/108: Telegram

The Chargé in Iceland (Warner) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, September 9, 1942—3 p. m.

[Received 5:02 p. m.]

470. Legation’s 463, September 8, 4 p. m. Parliament passed the Government bill yesterday evening and is scheduled to adjourn this evening. The present Government is to remain in office until after the general elections which have been fixed for October 18 and 19.

The Prime Minister handed me a note this noon in reply to the Legation’s note of August 20 23 (Legation’s telegram No. 429, August 20 22).

21 This sentence is apparently garbled.

22 Not printed.

23 See telegram No. 268, August 18, 9 p. m., to the Chargé in Iceland, p. 17.
His note repeats in confirmation the Department’s observation that in normal times the abrogation of the Union and establishment of a republic would be matters to be decided by the Icelandic people in accordance with their needs and aspirations and continues by saying that Parliament and the Government have decided to postpone for the present, formal abrogation of the Union and the proposed change to a republic and instead have provided measures for effecting these matters “whenever considered opportune”.

The Prime Minister orally stated that the steps taken by him to bring about the postponement of definite action on the independence question would be detrimental to his party in the coming elections and have caused many difficulties for him within his party. The Progressives have taken advantage of his embarrassing situation and for political ends have made bitter personal attacks on him although they are well aware of the reasons for his action.

Since the Prime Minister was obliged to show his memorandum of August 8 and the Legation’s note of August 20 to all members of Parliament he inquires whether the Department will authorize him to publish these communications. He believes that such publication would put an end to current erroneous conjectures and rumors and would be in keeping with the “friendly spirit” which lies behind the United States Government’s observations. The Legation believes that the publication of the communications would be desirable insofar as local reactions are concerned. The Prime Minister would appreciate a prompt reply in view of the current situation.

WARRNER

859A.00/108 : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Chargé in Iceland (Warner)

WASHINGTON, September 16, 1942—8 p.m.

304. Your 470, September 9. We have no objection to publication by the Prime Minister of his memorandum of August 8 and the Legation’s note of August 20. However, we do not now contemplate publishing this correspondence here.

HULL

859A.00/116

Memorandum by the Acting Chief of the Division of European Affairs (Atherton) to the Secretary of State

[WASHINGTON,] September 21, 1942.

MR. SECRETARY: The Minister of Iceland \(^{25}\) tells us informally that his brother, the Prime Minister, has been under very heavy political

\(^{25}\) Thor Thors.
attack as the result of his recent action in obtaining, in compliance with the suggestion of the United States Government, passage by the Icelandic Parliament of a resolution temporarily shelving the independence question. The Prime Minister is faced with general elections in about three weeks and fears that his political opponents may be able to make some headway with the electorate. The Prime Minister believes that his position would be strengthened if the United States would approve of his advancing at this time the proposal that the new Parliament to be elected at the forthcoming general elections pass a resolution declaring that Iceland will become a Republic in 1944. This would be after the normal expiry date of the Treaty of Union with Denmark, December 31, 1943. If this suggestion meets with your approval, the Icelandic Minister wishes to call upon you, make the proposal directly to you, and receive your reply for transmission to the Prime Minister.

The European Division can see no objection to the Prime Minister’s proposal, nor does Mr. Berle,28 who thinks that our line should be that we have no objection to the exercise by Iceland of any right which she has under her treaty with Denmark. Our objection to the immediate abrogation of the treaty was that it would have been a unilateral breach of the terms of the treaty while Iceland was under United States protection.

If you are prepared to give your approval to the Prime Minister’s proposal, I should be glad to arrange with your office for an appointment for the Icelandic Minister to see you. The matter is somewhat urgent from the Icelandic point of view.

I should add that after receiving your reply, the Icelandic Minister proposes to fly to Iceland to explain the American point of view directly to his brother, the Prime Minister.

RAY ATHERTON

Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State

[WASHINGTON,] September 22, 1942.

The Minister of Iceland called at his request. After some general exchange of observations he said that the Prime Minister of Iceland desired to advance the proposal that the new Parliament, to be elected at the forthcoming general elections, pass a resolution declaring that Iceland will become a republic in 1944. He stated that the adoption of this resolution would be after the normal expiration date of the Treaty of Union with Denmark, which was December 31, 1943. I promptly replied that there was no objection whatever on the part

28 Adolf A. Berle, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State.

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of this Government to the proposal of the Prime Minister. Furthermore, I added that this Government is always gratified to see a democracy function to the fullest practical extent. The Minister expressed himself as much pleased and said that his Government would likewise be much pleased. He added that his Government would be glad to hand a note to this effect to the American Minister in Iceland and let him make a statement similar to the one which I am today making to the Minister here for his Government. I said that I saw no objection to this procedure.

C[ordell] H[ull]

The Minister in Iceland (Morris) to the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs (Thors) 27

No. 5

REYKJAVIK, October 14, 1942.

EXCELLENCY: With reference to the oral message conveyed to Your Excellency on September 27, 1942, by the American Chargé d’Affaires ad interim, I have the honor to confirm herewith that there would be no objection whatsoever on the part of the Government of the United States of America to the proposal which Your Excellency now has under consideration, namely, that a resolution be approved by the new Parliament when it convenes declaring that in 1944 Iceland will become a republic.

Accept [etc.]

LELAND MORRIS

27Copy transmitted to the Department by the Minister in Iceland in his despatch No. 8, October 21; received October 31.