

Document 15
Papers of Joseph M. Jones

March 12, 1947

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILE

The Drafting of the President's Message to Congress
on the Greek Situation
Delivered before a Joint Session of Congress
March 12, 1947.

The early part of this record is hearsay from Acheson and others concerned. When the message came from the British Ambassador on February 24, Secretary Marshall took up the matter promptly with the President, with the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, and with the Chiefs of Staff, and it was decided that prompt and vigorous action was necessary.

The next step was the calling of Congressional leaders to the White House on February 27. At that meeting (according to Mr. Acheson) Mr. Acheson and the Secretary, in the presence of the President, presented the problem to Congressional leaders in outline form. The reaction of the Congressional leaders was rather trivial. At that point, Mr. Acheson then launched into a full analysis of just what Greece and Turkey meant to the security of the United States. He apparently reviewed the situation throughout the world, the pressure of communist parties everywhere, and the necessity, in the interest of the security of the United States, in taking a firm stand.

Most of the Congressional leaders were greatly shaken and impressed with this analysis and promised to support whatever measures should be necessary, on the condition that the President should explain the situation fully to Congress in a special message, and to the people by radio. They felt that they could support such a program only if the public were apprised of the grim facts. The President promised to go to the Congress and the people in this manner. He also promised to have a program, including the details of what would be required, prepared for a meeting of the Congressional leaders which he would call eight days thereafter, on Friday, March 7th.

Mr. Acheson called a meeting of key Departmental officers in the Secretary's office Friday morning, February 28. Present among others were Loy Henderson and Jack Hickerson (who were given chief responsibilities in the drafting of a program), Llewellyn Thompson, John Jernegan, John Howard of DE, Havlik, Tyler Wood, Francis Russell and myself, John Gange, etc. There Mr. Acheson in a masterful way described the meeting with Congressional leaders of the day before, outlined the situation as he had outlined it to the Congressional leaders, and told us that we would have to get to work and figure out a program and write a message to Congress and a radio speech for the President. There was before the meeting a document drafted in the Central Secretariat by John Gange (a copy of which I do not have) outlining the various parts of the program that would need to be worked up within the next week.

Mr. Acheson

Mr. Acheson then retired and Henderson (later replaced by Hickerson) took charge and began assigning responsibilities. When he got down to the drafting of a message to Congress and a radio address for the President, Hickerson very quickly said that he and Henderson would attend to that.

At the end of the meeting Hickerson said that this was certainly the most important thing that had happened since Pearl Harbor and that we should all approach our tasks with humility. We all felt bowled over by the gravity of the situation and the immensity of the steps that were contemplated.

The record from here on involves only the drafting of the President's message to Congress.

Friday afternoon Francis Russell invited me to sit in with the SWNCC Sub-Committee on Information which met to consider the problem of how the question should be presented to the public. In all of SWNCC's consideration there was never any distinction between how the problem should be presented by the President and how it should be presented in background form by the Departmental officers to journalists, radio people, etc. for the purpose of building up support for the Department's policy.

A somewhat smaller group representing the SWNCC Sub-Committee met in Francis Russell's office Saturday morning, March 1, to continue the work and to draft themes, background data, arguments, etc.

Over the week-end Francis Russell, Llewellyn Thompson, and John Jernegan refined the themes and arguments advanced at the previous meetings and worked up the "Information Program of United States aid to Greece", which was sent to Mr. Acheson on Tuesday, March 4.

Meanwhile, over the week-end several of us tried our hands at drafts of the President's message. Loy Henderson wrote a full-length message as did Gordon Merriam, and I confined myself to an attempt to set a tone in five pages of draft.

On Monday, March 3, Loy Henderson sent all of these, and perhaps some others, to Mr. Acheson. Late that afternoon Loy called me and said Mr. Acheson liked my draft best and to stand by for a call from Dean Acheson. Acheson called me late in the afternoon and told me to go ahead with the draft and to get in touch with Henderson.

The next day, March 4, a drafting conference was held in Mr. Acheson's office and I, as the drafter, took copious notes. Mr. Acheson started with the SWNCC paper and it provided a substantial part of the message. This paper, and parts of various drafts were mentioned, and Mr. Acheson indicated whether or not they might be pertinent. From the whole I got a general idea of what was desired.

I therefore worked late that night and turned out a working draft, which was dated March 4. This was considered in conference

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in Mr. Acheson's office on March 5. This draft seemed to meet with general approval. Mr. Acheson said it was a good draft and proceeded to lead the group to a sentence by sentence consideration. Following this meeting, I prepared another draft, which was considered on Thursday March 6. After corrections this was sent over to the White House on Friday March 7. It was also sent to General Marshall in Paris, who replied the next day approving the message except for three minor points, which were deleted.

On Saturday, March 8, Carl Humelsine and I were called over to see Mr. Clark Clifford, Assistant to the President, at the White House. Mr. Clifford had a few specific suggestions but his main criticism was directed at the order of presentation of the draft. The earlier draft opened with the difficulties of Greece, went on to the general situation, and came back to Greece. He suggested that it begin with Greece and discuss Greece, proceed to the general, and then work up to specific proposals and peroration. I then returned to the Department and in an hour and a half, using the same material and same working, turned the whole thing around and it worked out very well. In fact, it was a marked improvement. This draft we returned to the White House and Mr. Clifford considered it on Sunday, March 9.

On Monday, March 10, Clifford brought over and discussed with Mr. Acheson, Mr. Humelsine and me the first White House draft (dated March 10), which was in essence the draft we had sent him plus a few additions. Most of these additions we considered objectionable and Mr. Clifford agreed in discussion to eliminate them. His readiness to acquiesce suggested that they were not his ideas but those of other White House Assistants (not the President's).

Mr. Clifford then returned to the White House and a conference was held with President Truman and Admiral Leahy, and several other advisors. At this conference the President and his advisors approved the draft virtually as presented to them, making only a few exceedingly minor changes.

This draft was sent over to the Department on Monday, March 11, and became the official message.

I have never working on an important State document before that went so smoothly. The major decisions had already been taken, and the specific legislative proposals were being prepared by others. The character and identity of my original draft was preserved throughout. The force of the argument was increased by the editing, rather than the contrary. This I attribute primarily to the fact that the President had promised to explain this situation frankly to the public and there was no possibility of going back on that promise and thus of watering down the argument. But entirely aside from that, I discovered no inclination whatever on the part of anybody in the Department or the White House to water it down. It represented genuinely the unanimous opinion of the Department.

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There is another thing that should be said for the record. Dean Acheson told us at the first conference on this matter that we should proceed in our work, and with the President's message to Congress, without regard to General Marshall's position in Moscow. The General made this decision himself and ordered it emphasized to all concerned. This was in our opinion the act of a genuine statesman.

When the President returned from his Mexico trip he agreed to go to Congress in person on March 12 and deliver his message, thus obviating the necessity for a separate radio speech.

The message was in my opinion momentous not only for its content, but for the way in which the Government functioned in the crisis: fast, brave, and clean. It seemed to me as though it marked our passing into adulthood in the conduct of foreign affairs.