



The War Will Be Staged in Europe

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AFTER SHOOTING 296 ANIMALS on his African expedition of 1909, Theodore Roosevelt took a tour of Europe. On April 10, 1910, Gifford Pinchot, a member of Roosevelt's former Cabinet, visited him in Porto Maurizio, on the Italian Riviera. The press thought Pinchot might be trying to get him to run again for President in 1912.

From March through May, Roosevelt had barely had a day when he didn't have to give a speech. When he walked out on stage in Christiania, Norway — now Oslo — on May 5, his voice was almost at its end. Nevertheless, the New York Times wrote, he “made a deep impression on the audience which gathered to-day in the National Theatre to hear his address on ‘International Peace’ before the Nobel Prize Committee.”

Roosevelt had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906, after mediating the end of the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. That summer, diplomats from both sides had met in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, at his invitation, to hammer out their differences. It became the first example of “multi-track diplomacy,” where social events surrounding the hard-headed meetings enabled belligerents to build personal connections that they then took back to the bargaining table.

In Christiania, King Haakon and Queen Maud listened to the former President pitch an approach to peace based on extending the example of the Supreme Court of the United States to international arbitration, limiting armaments, and one other idea that the London Morning Post judged “too fantastic to be realized.”

“It would be a masterstroke,” Roosevelt said, “if those great powers honestly bent on peace would form a League of Peace, not only to keep the peace among themselves, but to prevent, by force if necessary, its being broken by others.” Sadly, he found Europe's leaders more interested in preparing for war than for peace.

Two years later, with Roosevelt winning primary after primary, Gifford Pinchot invited 'Abdu'l-Bahá to his estate, Grey Towers in Milford, Pennsylvania, to spend two days with him and his friends. It was built in fieldstone like a French

château with three tall conical towers, and stood on a hilltop just a mile from the Delaware River. Pinchot had been America's first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, spearheading the conservation policies that were one of Roosevelt's highest priorities.

'Abdu'l-Bahá took the train to Milford on the morning of June 3, 1912, from Penn Station. His chronicler, Mahmúd, said that he conversed so much over the two days that his words alone would fill a book. Given the kinds of people who were Pinchot's friends, the subject turned, inevitably, to politics and war.

In Norway, Roosevelt had suggested that the U. S. Supreme Court might point a way to international agreement, but 'Abdu'l-Bahá went further. "Europe and most other areas will be forced to follow your system," he said. "Tremendous changes will take place in Europe. The great centralized powers will break up into smaller independent states."

In fact, the whole colonial project of governing from the center, he said, was unworkable, "for no matter how great the ability and wisdom of the statesmen of that center, or how developed their sense of justice, they will still not be fully informed of the needs of every town and village and cannot exert themselves justly for the betterment of their surrounding dependencies."

The cause of the breakup, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, would be a major war. "It will certainly come about but America will not participate in it. This war will be staged in Europe."

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