

going to be the difficulties about making peace after possibly a long and bitter war, but I am not convinced that those difficulties are any greater than the difficulties that would confront Europe after attempting to make a patched-up peace that, as I said the other day, would be capable of being represented in Germany as the conclusion of a war on the whole not unsuccessful, not too costly, and, therefore, not too discouraging for the German mind in future.

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I am quite certain that Herr Hitler is very anxious for peace—on his own terms. I am not so sure yet that he is anxious for peace on terms that would make for the peace of Europe for the next generation. We can all reach without difficulty agreement on general principles in this House. We all feel that it is a good plan, if you can, to settle by negotiation. Nobody can feel more strongly than I do the horror and the tragedy of war; nobody can feel more strongly than any one of your Lordships how criminally wrong it would be to miss any real opportunity for peace.

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I do not want to travel over what I said last week, and I would conclude merely by two observations addressed to the question itself. The right reverend Prelate was good enough to mention the two conditions that I had been able to state last week as being conditions prerequisite, as I thought, for the success of a conference. I do not wish to vary those conditions, because I think they were well founded. The peace appeal of their Majesties the King of the Belgians and the Queen of the Netherlands was, the House will remember, addressed to three Governments, the French and ourselves, and the Germans, and the House will remember the answers that were made. I do not think it can fairly be said that our answer and the answer of the French closed the door to the possibility of further negotiation. Your Lordships will remember that, after stating that the aggression against Poland was only a fresh instance of German policy, we stated in quite general terms (and it is perhaps the difference between the statement in general terms and the statement in terms more precise that led Lord Arnold to ask one or two of the questions that he did):—

“Should your Majesty be able to communicate to me any proposals from Germany of such a character as to afford real prospect of achieving the purpose I have described above, I can say at once that my Governments would give them their most earnest consideration.”

The French reply was on lines not dissimilar.

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*Extract from Speech by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on
December 14, 1939.*

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I should like, further, to say a few words about the bearing of the Finnish conflict upon our war aims. The opportunity provided by this conflict has been eagerly seized upon by the German propaganda machine, and by many people acting consciously or unconsciously in its service, to deflect attention from the primary objective of the Allied war effort, which is the defeat of Nazi Germany. We must never lose sight of that objective. We must never forget that it was German aggression which paved the way for the Soviet attack on Poland and Finland, and that Germany, alone among the nations, is even now abetting by word and deed the Russian aggressor. We must all give what help and support we can spare to the latest victim of these destructive forces; but meanwhile it is only by concentrating on our task of resistance to German aggression, and thus attacking the evil at its root, that we can hope to save the nations of Europe from the fate which must otherwise overtake them.

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