

Though Germany had previously promised President Wilson that it would cease attacking neutral carriers, on February 1, 1917 Germany departed from its policy of restraint and began unrestricted submarine warfare against all ships destined for Britain. Several American ships were sunk in February and March of 1917. At about this time, newspapers published an intercepted telegram from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the government of Mexico, proposing a German-Mexican alliance. On April 2, President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany; Congress complied four days later.

As you read, think about why the Zimmermann Note would have enraged Americans and contributed to a growing sentiment in the U.S. that the nation should enter the war on the side of the Allies.

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19 January, 1917:  
The Zimmerman Note  
to the German Minister to Mexico

Berlin, January 19, 1917

On the first of February we intend to begin submarine warfare unrestricted. In spite of this, it is our intention to endeavor to keep neutral the United States of America.

If this attempt is not successful, we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and together make peace. We shall give general financial support, and it is understood that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. The details are left to you for settlement....

You are instructed to inform the President of Mexico of the above in the greatest confidence as soon as it is certain that there will be an outbreak of war with the United States and suggest that the President of Mexico, on his own initiative, should communicate with Japan suggesting adherence at once to this plan; at the same time, offer to mediate between Germany and Japan.

Please call to the attention of the President of Mexico that the employment of ruthless submarine warfare now promises to compel England to make peace in a few months.

Zimmerman  
(Secretary of State)