

Kaiser Wilhelm II and German Interests in China

[The following document illustrate the style of German imperialism in the Wilhelmine era. An uprising of the Society of Righteous Harmonious Fists--the Boxer Rebellion--was a desperate effort by native Chinese forces to stave off foreign influence and the dismemberment of their country by the Great Powers. In June 1900, 140,000 Boxers occupied Peking, laying siege to the foreigners and attacking Chinese converts to Christianity. An international expeditionary force raised the siege in August, but not before several Europeans, including the German envoy and several missionaries, had been murdered. The Boxer Rebellion occasioned heated nationalistic rhetoric all over Europe. Although Kaiser Wilhelm II outdid all others in his posturings, behind the rhetoric, there stood concrete economic interests that had to be protected if Germany were to achieve its "place in the sun."

Upon confirmation of the news that the German envoy to Peking had been murdered, a military force was assembled in Bremerhaven for a punitive expedition. Wilhelm and his wife happened to be present at the embarkation, when the Kaiser made this impromptu speech to the soldiers on July 2, 1900. Source: Ernst Johann (ed.), *Reden des Kaisers: Ansprachen, Predigten und Trinksprüche Wilhelms II* (Munich, 1966), pp. 86-88. Translated by Richard S. Levy.]

TEXT 1

Into the midst of the deepest peace--alas, not surprising to me--the torch of war has been hurled. A crime unprecedented in its brazenness, horrifying in its cruelty, has struck my trusted representative and carried him off. The ambassadors of the other powers are in danger of their lives and along with them your comrades who were dispatched for their protection. Perhaps, they have today fought their last battle. The German flag has been insulted, and the German Empire held up to scorn. This demands an exemplary punishment and revenge.

With fearful speed the conditions have become extremely serious. Since I have summoned you to arms, [the situation has become] still more serious. What I had hoped to restore with the help of the marines will now require the united contingents of troops from all the civilized nations. Today the chief of the cruiser squadron has implored me to consider sending an [entire] division.

You will oppose an enemy no less resolute in the face of death than yourselves. Trained by European officers, the Chinese have learned the use of European weapons. Thank God your comrades in the marines and in my navy, with whom you will join, have asserted and maintained the old German repute in combat; they have defended themselves with glory and victory and eased your task.

Thus I send you now to avenge injustice, and I shall not rest until the German flag, united with those of the other powers, waves victoriously over the Chinese, planted on the walls of Peking, and dictating peace to the Chinese.

Maintain a good comradeship with all the troops whom you will join with there. Russians, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and whoever else--they all fight for one cause, for civilization.

Yet we also bear in mind something higher, our religion, and the defense and protection of our brothers overseas, some of whom have stood up for their Savior with their life.

Think also of our military honor, of those who have fought for you, and depart with the old motto of the flag of Brandenburg: "Trust God, defend yourself bravely. In that lies all your honor! For whoever ventures on God with a full heart will never be routed."

The flags that wave above you here go into fire for the first time. Bring them back to me pure, unblemished, and without stain!

My thanks and my concern, my prayers and my solicitude will not leave you. With these I accompany you.