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Franklin D. Roosevelt

Habana, Cuba,  
April 17, 1940.

Dear Raymond:

I have your letter of April 13th which I am delighted to have. First of all let me tell you how pleased I am that you are now in charge of the new Division and I am confident that you will not only enjoy it, but that you will do a most worthwhile job. I need not tell you that I gave the matter a great deal of thought, for I would not have asked you to make the financial sacrifice, which is inevitable in a Departmental detail, if I had not felt that it would be to your advantage and that of the Department. For you, it will be an excellent experience because it will give you an opportunity not only to get in touch with all kinds of people in Washington and at home throughout the country, but it will give you a knowledge of the inner workings of our Government which is of tremendous importance and value to an officer in the field. You will find, after you return to the field, that the experience which you have gained, particularly in the operations of Government at home, will be of tremendous value. I look forward to a long period of usefulness for you in responsible posts in the Foreign Service. We have need of men like you, with determination and courage, understanding and vision, and with the initiative and industry which must go with them. We will need men in the field in the future more than ever who will have to be men who understand every factor involved in the problems with which we will have to deal. Both from the personal and official point of view, therefore, the detail in the Department will, I am confident, prove not only satisfactory but effective.

With respect to the opportunities of the office you now fill, those you have adequately grasped and I am sure you will have availed yourself of them. I am confident that through your skill and understanding we will be able to establish those relationships with Commerce and Agriculture in particular and with other Departments and agencies which are necessary.

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Raymond Geist, Esquire,  
Department of State,  
Washington, D. C.

I made a good beginning in this direction during the last few years and I am confident that you will carry on this work in the most effective way. If I were you, I would cultivate personally men like Noble, Young, Jones and people like that in Commerce and some of the higher officials in Agriculture. I think it will be helpful to establish very close contact with Warren Pierson, of the Export-Import Bank, who is a very capable man, and who is a little skeptical of our Service because he has met some of our more disinterested officers in the field, and perhaps we have not been supplying the Bank with all the useful information we could give them. The suspicion and distrust which exists, more particularly with Commerce, I am sure you will be able to eradicate by this constant personal contact. I think you are absolutely right not to make any objection to the reporting schedules which Commerce has submitted and, as you say, this is a question to work out through experience and I am confident that, if you can show that certain schedules are too heavy or that they are not essential, the matter can be arranged.

I am particularly happy to hear of your speaking engagements and to know that you are going into this on such a scale. It is hard work, but it is extremely useful. It brings Departmental people in direct contact with the business men of the country: that is what we need. You can do this admirably, and it is one of the things I had in mind that you could do in the Department. You know how to speak to business men and how to gain their confidence through performance. I, unfortunately, was not able to do as much speaking during my tour of duty as I should have liked, but I did as much of it as my duties in the Department permitted.

I am very happy that we have reached this decision with regard to the sale of planes to the Allies. I agree with you that the conversation with Farley that evening in our house was helpful, and I have reason to know that he took a very favorable attitude in this particular matter. I did not miss any opportunity in other high places to advance this same idea and I think, without egotism, I can claim a certain amount of credit for having put this over. Excellent as this move is, so far as it goes, I agree with you that we must go further.

I have been particularly interested in reading what you say concerning the general situation. I agree with you that the task before the Allies is an enormous one. I still believe that they will be able to bring about the defeat of Germany without our active participation. I think the move into Scandinavia by the Germans is an indication of the internal situation in Germany and of the pressing need for iron supplies. I will not go into this further, but you know that position. I do not believe they

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would have undertaken this move into Scandinavia had it not been for the absolute necessity of safe-guarding the Swedish ore for themselves. Of course they have a longer range position in mind as well, for if after the war they can keep control of Scandinavia it tremendously strengthens the situation of Germany in the production of iron and steel, in which field they must be secure if Germany is to have the economic and political supremacy in Europe and in the world for which they are striving.

Similarly I do not believe that their provision of gasoline and high grade lubricating oil is adequate to meet the needs of active sustained warfare and for this reason I think the move against Rumania, by either Germany or Russia, must be expected. It may be the next move which will be made. It is not at all unlikely that Russia will permit herself to be used further and be the one to take this step for Germany.

There are certainly indications that Mussolini would like to carry through his idea of joining up with Germany. How utterly mistaken he is that his position could be maintained or improved if Germany should win the war. If Germany should win the war, Mussolini and Italy would be mere vassals of Germany. If England and France win the war, Mussolini will probably have to go, but the position of Italy would be maintained. This, however, is the trouble with all the dictators for they are more interested in themselves than in their country. There are some disquietening factors in my opinion which would indicate that Mussolini is certainly considering some action which really puts him on the side of Germany. Whether he will dare to do it, in view of the known feelings of the Italians, is still the question. Certainly on land Italy could not do much on the side of Germany, but under the dictatorships, in spite of the will of the people, Italy might complicate the problem tremendously in the Mediterranean.

I still believe that Germany is not capable of sustained effort in active warfare. I ~~haven't~~ do believe that it would be to our advantage now to help the Allies in every possible way short of sending men. It would be cheaper for us in the end. I wish we could follow the policy of enlightened self interest, but I need not tell you that one of the most unfortunate things now is that we are in the midst of a Presidential election campaign which cripples us so far as effective action in our own interest is concerned.

My own work here is progressing. I have not made as much progress as I should like. I am working against tremendous odds. I have no illusions as to the difficulties of the task before me. I realize that it is not possible to do in a few

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days what has to be done. I am not at all discouraged and I believe that within the next six months we shall make real progress here in the right direction. Sometime I will tell you about this complicated situation here, for it would be interesting to you as a problem in Government.

We are comfortably settled in our house, and today we expect to sign the contract for the new residence which should now be completed within the year. It will, I believe, a fine job. Some people, of course, will think that I took good care of myself in this respect and will not realize that these plans for the Embassy residence in Habana have been under way for several years and that the definitive plans were made long before there was any thought of my coming here. Marion's knee is somewhat improved, but I fear that it will be a slow process. We are happy in our new surroundings, but I need not tell you that we think of you and our friends in Washington often. I appreciate your letter more than I can say, and I hope you will write me when you can. I am so happy that you are in the Department and I am confident that, in spite of the hard work involved, you are going to get tremendous satisfaction out of it.

Marion joins in love and good wishes to you and your sister. Sometime you must make us a visit here and I hope before too long.

Cordially and faithfully yours,

GEORGE S. MESSERSMITH

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