

*Approved*

A-M

January 3, 1938.

The Secretary: *+ U + Sum + Moffat*

The very pertinent remarks which you made yesterday with regard to the mystery which shrouds what is passing in Russia these days, on the complete uncertainty of what course Russian policy may take, on the difficulty there in getting in touch with those really in control, as well as on the importance which all this mystery and uncertainty may have on major developments at this critical time, were such as to crystallize my own thoughts which have been along this line.

I see the general situation becoming more serious and more fraught with danger. Although the internal situation in the dictatorships and in Japan is undoubtedly growing weaker in most respects, their armaments and in certain aspects their military strength are still increasing. Their power to make and carry on a war with major powers is perhaps decreasing but their influence on other countries and deteriorating effect on the general situation are still increasing. The recent developments in Rumania are of first importance and may have a disintegrating, if not catastrophic, effect

effect in Southeastern Europe. Rumanian oil and grain are of first importance to Germany and, if Rumania follows on the course that she is now apparently on, it will be impossible to hold together the Little Entente and the repercussions on Hungary and Austria will be certain.

I think we are in much the same position today as England was in 1914. It was the lack of clarity in the British position and the uncertainty of what attitude she would take which led the Central Powers to start the World War. The Central Powers were perhaps badly informed and misunderstood the British psychology and we may say now that there should have been no difficulty in their knowing what attitude England would take. Today, with England and France relatively weakened and with the world situation completely changed, it is, I believe, the lack of clarity in our own position and the misunderstanding of what attitude we would eventually take which is encouraging certain countries to continue on their reckless course of utter disregard for law, order and international obligations. Just as in 1914 a clear understanding of the British position would probably have prevented that war from breaking out which developed into the World War, so today a clearer and stronger attitude by us would <sup>probably</sup> deter any further adventures by certain powers which would in the end almost inevitably lead to a world

world war into which we will in some form or another be drawn or from the consequences of which we will suffer practically as much as the participants.

It is my considered opinion that unless the dictatorships break up from within in the near future, we shall see a further spread of such governments to smaller and less powerful countries which will feel that they can no longer avoid making a decision and will line themselves up on the side of the dictatorships, that is, on the side of lawlessness and disregard of international obligations. There is in my opinion only one way to stem this tide and that is through a determined stand by the major countries still holding to the principles of law and order through making it clear that they intend to stick to them and to maintain them at home as well as their rights and interests abroad. We do not like to face it but we must -- and that is the realization that we occupy today in world power and influence the position held in 1914 by England. The power of England and France remains very real but because of strategic and other factors their power of initiative we must recognize as decreased. We must increasingly take the initiative, and not too slowly, in my opinion not because other countries may wish us to and not because so many smaller countries are looking to us as the only one capable of giving that leadership, but because the protection of our own vital interests requires

requires it.

We have to base our policy on the facts and the facts show that the other great powers maintaining the principles we do are either incapable of initiative or unwilling to take it without a certainty of greater clarity in our position. Although the desperado countries are in most respects essentially weaker than they were, in this general uncertainty their influence is growing and a crisis is approaching. The importance of what has happened in Rumania and what consequences it may have cannot be underestimated. As I pointed out in my memorandum to you of October 11, 1937, the ground is fertile in more than one country in this western world for these ideas. What has happened in Rumania, we have seen take place more innocuously nearer home in Brazil and, if the deterioration continues, we may look forward to more rapid and cumulative developments on our doorstep.

It is not my intention in this memorandum to go into any details but to express briefly the viewpoint which you know I hold and have held for some years that these developments in the Far East and in Europe are of primary importance to us and must be considered in our long range policy for the maintenance of our prestige and influence, for the sustaining of our public welfare at home and for the keeping of the obligation which we have  
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with other nations for the maintenance intact of peace and order and our international obligations. There is a position and a consequent obligation upon us which we did not seek and which we do not want but which, in the wise formulation of policy, we cannot avoid for it is there just the same and the consequences of our avoiding it are emerging more clearly every day. If we avoid the obligation, the chances are increasingly that we will see the rest of the world falling into chaos around us and the consequences for us, while not so immediately as catastrophic as for others, are clear.

I believe, therefore, we must begin to take a certain initiative even though in spite of improved and more understanding public opinion we must proceed slowly.

It seems that we are making it clear that we are increasing our armaments in the measure necessary to protect ourselves and our rights and interests in a disordered world in which they are so definitely threatened. I think we must go further and explore certain situations with which we may be faced in case it should come to armed conflict which can no longer be held as out of the question no matter how much we wish to avoid it. The immediate point which I wish to make is that Soviet Russia is a very important factor in the situation. Although we have a very competent Charge d'Affaires there and a very considerable

considerable establishment, we are, through no fault of their own but because of known conditions there, not receiving any real information concerning the situation in that country nor concerning its present or probable future policy. Our officers have only the most inadequate and ineffective contact with the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office seems to have no influence on policy and apparently little direct touch with those who are making policy.

While this is true in the other dictatorships as well as in Russia, it is more true there. We at least know what the objectives and in a measure the policies of Berlin and Rome are. We do not know this of Moscow. The English have sent Halifax to Berlin to endeavor to determine more definitely German objectives and policy when we well know what they are. No similar effort seems to have been made by England or France to establish this direct contact or to exchange information with Stalin and his immediate associates in Russia. As in the other dictatorships these are the only ones who can speak with authority.

As in my opinion we are vitally concerned, I think it is of first importance that someone for our Government should have the opportunity of speaking of these fundamental things with Stalin and others. We know how ignorant they are of what is really happening in the world just as we are  
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of what is taking place in Russia. We know that nothing we say here or elsewhere to a Soviet Ambassador gets to the fountain head except in a most attenuated form. All this it seems to me is of increasingly primary importance. I venture to suggest that someone should go for us to Russia, quietly and unostentatiously, who would under very specific instructions from the President and the Secretary get in touch with Stalin and his immediate associates. On account of the language difficulty on both sides, it would be important that one of our most competent officers in Russian be present no matter what interpreter or intermediary may be present on the Russian side. The presence of such a competent officer in Russian on our side is absolutely essential if such a conference should have value. I do not venture here to take up what we might say but I do wish to go on record as believing that we should seriously consider a step in this direction now as a part of that initiative and formulation of clear definite policy which I think we should not delay.

G. S. Messersmith.

*While we know so little of Russia, it is dangerous to do any thinking that does not take fully into account the force that may be there, & how it may be used.*

A-M: GEM: VNG

*RM*