

899
October 11, 1937.

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I cannot escape the conviction, growing out of my experience and the following of developments in the general situation, that the gravity of the actual and developing position in Europe and in the Far East cannot be exaggerated, that it has for us a vital significance. I therefore take the liberty of bringing the following observations to you as of possible interest.

(a) Although the conflict in the Far East provoked by Japan in China now has the front center of the stage, and the conflict in Spain and the Mediterranean question with Italy so important a factor are well in the foreground, it is my considered opinion that the most important factor still is Germany. Until recently the developments in Germany and the plans of the national socialist regime affecting the interior of the country as well as Europe in general were in the foreground. Now these seem in the popular consciousness -- and perhaps in the minds of some responsible statesmen -- pushed very much in the background. The central thought I should like to emphasize in this memorandum is that the crux of the major problem which concerns the world and ourselves is still Germany. With the German problem settled and a Government there with which we and other countries could deal in a normal way, the questions in the Far East and in the Mediterranean as well as the general European question, would permit of fairly ready, gradual and reasonable settlement.

(b) There is a tendency to characterize the present disordered world relations as due to the struggle between "haves" and "have nots". This idea is being pushed forward principally by and in the dictatorships but there is a noticeable tendency to give credence to this as the principal factor in circles in other countries besides in the dictatorships. It is my opinion that there is something deeper and

more

more vital than a struggle between the "haves" and "have nots" and that it is this even more basic clash of the ideologies which must be recognized. It is very simple and perhaps convenient for some in the democracies to state that they are not interested in ideologies but the most vital and basic factor in the present situation is this conflict of ideologies.

We are witnessing in at least three of the major dictatorships a reversion to the doctrine of force and of might and to an entirely different international morality than that which has slowly and painfully been built up in the last centuries. This resurrected law of force is to replace present international law and practice and a whole new system of public and private morals based on the doctrine of might and force is to be imposed on the world. The problems involved in the struggle conceived to exist between the "haves" and the "have nots" merely form one of the external presentations of this new international morality.

It is becoming increasingly clear that if the democracies, including the United States, are not willing to defend their political, social and economic views now by all the peaceful methods at their command, it is only a question of time when they shall have to defend them with force.

(c) There is no logical escape from the fact that if the lawless nations continue to gain their ends through force, or through the threat of force, or if too dangerous compromises continue to be made as they have been made in recent years, disintegration will proceed inexorably and to the point at which the peace of the world will be definitely endangered and catastrophic war the sole possible outcome.

To the informed and observing there is no escape from the conclusion that the United States are the ultimate object of attack of the powers grouped in this new system of force and lawlessness, and that when the time comes for them to deal with the United States that country will be practically alone for the rest will have been cleared out of the way. That we are the last in the list of the nations against which this doctrine of force is to be applied can give us only small consolation. We have had the action of the Japanese in Manchukuo and now that in China. We have seen the Italian action in Ethiopia and now are observing it in Spain and in the Mediterranean. The authors of these policies have left no doubt either by their declarations

or their actions as to what their intentions are. With increasing successes pretense has been dropped and even the former barrage of protests of good intentions and pious declarations is disappearing. What we have so far seen and are seeing in the way of action and of this application of the doctrine of force as an instrument of policy is only the forerunner and must be viewed as only the forerunner of similar and more serious acts if the movement is not soon stopped. There is ample and increasing evidence that the doctrine of force is already having its cumulative effect.

So far the Western Hemisphere has been spared these acts of force by the lawless states. We in this hemisphere, however, know that the aspirations of Japan and Germany are in the western world. We have seen their tentative action and have felt its consequences at a time when the re-assertation of the doctrine of force was still in its infancy -- in fact hardly conceived. Once the position in Europe is propitious we can therefore realize the degree to which the force of the dictatorships will be felt in more than one spot in South America and further north. The ground in some of these states is already fairly propitious to receive a certain doctrine of force. The careful observer will not fail to keep in mind that the establishment of the dictatorships and the regime of force play into the hands of a brutish, power-seeking, utterly selfish group which is found in every country and which only needs encouragement and opportunity to lift up its head and assert itself.

(d) It is, therefore, not only territory which is in play -- as too many observers are inclined to think. In some ways territory is the least at stake. What is in play fundamentally are new ideas and new forces which are constantly coming more strongly into action and whose field of action is definitely, if slowly, expanding. All these new ideas and forces are directly opposed to our concepts, basic ideals and principles of action.

The maneuvers now in progress in the Far East, in Spain, and in the Mediterranean and in the general European picture are only steps along a long road which the dictators have fairly well surveyed and laid out. They may even be considered, catastrophic as they appear now, as only intermediary and subsidiary steps. The final aim of the dictatorships, under the subtle leadership of the present Government in Germany, is the disintegration of the British

Empire, the consequent weakening of England in Europe and the opening of the way to attack on the United States.

The basic plan conceived by the national socialists in control in Germany is (1) complete control of Germany through the coordination of all public opinion forming means within the country and complete control by the party of every aspect and expression of German life, (2) physical absorption of Austria and Czechoslovakia, (3) complete political, social and economic hegemony of Southeastern Europe by Germany, (4) the acquisition of the Ukraine, (5) concurrent with these steps the isolation of Russia, (6) the weakening of France through the break-down of Soviet alliances and by the development of English-German friendship and cooperation, (7) in the meantime and concurrent with the latter part of the foregoing progress, the disintegration of the British Empire would be in progress and reach a point when this disintegration could be accelerated by Germany at any time she saw fit, (8) with England weakened, the way would be open to us as the richest and strongest country of the world. It is really against the United States and England that the program is directed for we are considered the only worthy antagonists and we have what they want.

The foregoing program is not based on any idle suppositions but on first hand conversations with major leaders of the present German Government who in such conversations have made no secret of their intentions. If there are those who still believe that such a program credits the fascist states with too sinister objectives, the story can now be read in the facts themselves by all but the blind.

(e) The externals of the whole movement in the Far East and in Europe give the picture of a reversion to the worst stages of feudalism. Our interests are as much threatened as those of any other country. As the Department of State is the instrument through which the foreign policy of our Government is conducted and is the adviser to the President on matters affecting foreign relations the responsibility resting upon the Department in the face of present developments is a serious one.

The policy of the United States is definitely one of peace but it is believed that the people of the United States still envisage this as the maintenance of a long range, a long term peace and not as a policy aimed at the maintenance of an armistice bought at a price which means ruin through war at the end. The only safe policy it would

seem

seem in one which does not risk the future and the destruction of all that our country and people have stood for and struggled for. The policy which our interests would therefore dictate is a long range policy for peace, which looks clearly at the facts and which is based only on the facts as we must read them from day to day.

A negative attitude now on the developments which are taking place in the Far East and in Europe would present a great risk that the major bulwark which stands between us and the successful fascist states - the British Empire - will be destroyed. Once it is weakened our own position is weakened for then we will be practically alone.

(f) There are those who still need proof of the intentions of the lawless states. They seem to think that as long as their acts are aimed only at others it can be a matter of no concern to us. There could not possibly be a more fallacious viewpoint of our interests. If the cynicism of Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese militarists have not convinced in the past we now have the acts of all three in more than one country. As to the national socialist regime in Germany, which, as I have already indicated, is the main spring of the whole movement and the real power behind it, we have Hitler's own words. Those who know the national socialist leaders do not have any doubts as to their acts being even more ruthless than the Japanese and Italian massacres of civilians in Ethiopia, China and Spain.

It is not that proof is lacking but that truth is being ignored.

(g) It is the fears of war and the horrors of war which persist in the democratic states, and understandably so, which are paralyzing our action. It is exactly this which the fascist states are deliberately capitalizing. Just as in every political, social and economic sphere they are capitalizing the worst that lies in human nature in the most cynical fashion and have showed a realistic perception of these less fine human characteristics, -- so this fine feeling existent in the democracies and which finds expression in the fear and horror of war is being capitalized by these cynical regimes and so far with a success that seems incredible. This fear of war in the democracies which has been accompanied by an extraordinary patience which does them credit may if carried beyond a certain point lead to their ruin. It is in this particular

aspect

aspect that a dangerous game of poker is being played in Europe. The dictators hope and are playing their hand on the hope that the patience of the democracies will be carried beyond the point of safety. The democracies hope that by the exercise of patience they will wear out the dictatorships and in the meantime are increasing their own strength through rearmament. This is a dangerous game with great stakes for the stake is really peace and the saving of civilization.

(h) We recognize in the democracies that force and war are still instruments of international policy and action. This recognition is shown in the fact that we maintain armies and navies. Even our peace societies are in favor of certain armament for defense. We in the democracies, however, while recognizing force as unfortunately still an instrument of policy and while maintaining military and naval forces, wish to use them only for defense. The dictatorships, however, not only recognize force as an instrument of policy but consider it as an active instrument and are arming themselves to the teeth and brandishing their armaments before the world with the hope that through this threat of force over more peaceful nations they may gain advantages contrary to the international morality, right and decency. They know that they cannot now get away with this by the actual use of force if the other nations choose to assert themselves. It is therefore upon the fear of war in the democracies that they are playing and on the lack of complete unity of action between them.

It is out of these basic ideas that there grows this common action on the part of Germany, Italy and Japan when they lack any other common ground on which united action is usually based. They put out this definite threat of force and war hoping that, although the balance in the way of actual power is against them, their aggressive action and the fear of war will permit them to gain piecemeal, but steadily, their ends, and finally the goals which they have set for themselves.

In the United States we are increasingly being faced by a recognition of a fact that these developments in the Far East and in Europe cannot leave us cold; that it is on what happens there that will depend to a large extent our own security, happiness and maintenance of those ideals in which we believe. No matter how much, therefore, we may wish to feel ourselves aloof from what is happening in

the

the Far East and in Europe, no matter how much we should like to find shelter behind so-called neutrality legislation, our people are beginning to realize more fully every day that the vital question before them is whether we will follow a temporizing policy which will almost certainly bring war in the end or one which offers the hope of really maintaining peace, with decency and order. As the policy making Department of our Government in foreign affairs the responsibility for informing and guiding public opinion in its own interest is a heavy one on this Department.

Given the foregoing, I venture that all of our action now while having for its primary objective the maintenance of the general peace and our non-involvement in war must be the formulation of a policy which does not make that war practically inevitable in the end. It must be a long range policy.

G. S. Messersmith

A-M:CAM:VNG
fm