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State Dept. 1939-1940

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THE AMERICAN EMBASSY

TOKYO

December 14, 1940.

*C.F.
State*

Dear Frank:

I would give a great deal to know your mind about Japan and all her works. It seems to me to be increasingly clear that we are bound to have a showdown someday, and the principal question at issue is whether it is to our advantage to have that showdown sooner or to have it later.

The chief factors in the problem would seem, from this angle, to be:

(1) whether and when Britain is likely to win the European war;

(2) whether our getting into war with Japan would so handicap our help to Britain in Europe as to make the difference to Britain between victory and defeat; and

(3) to what extent our own policy in the Far East must be timed with our preparedness program and with respect to the relative strength of the American and the Japanese navies now and later.

Those are questions which, with our limited information here, I am not qualified even approximately to answer.

The President,

The White House.

From

From the Tokyo angle we see the picture roughly as follows:

After eight years of effort to build up something permanently constructive in American-Japanese relations, I find that diplomacy has been defeated by trends and forces utterly beyond its control, and that our work has been swept away as if by a typhoon with little or nothing remaining to show for it. Japan has become openly and unashamedly one of the predatory nations and part of a system which aims to wreck about everything that the United States stands for. Only insuperable obstacles will now prevent the Japanese from digging in permanently in China and from pushing the southward advance, with economic control as a preliminary to political domination in the areas marked down. Economic obstacles, such as may arise from American embargoes, will seriously handicap Japan in the long run, but meanwhile they tend to push the Japanese onward in a forlorn hope of making themselves economically self-sufficient.

History has shown that the pendulum in Japan is always swinging between extremist and moderate policies, but as things stand today we believe that the pendulum is more likely to swing still further toward extremes than to reverse its direction. Konoye, and especially Matsuoka, will fall in due course, but under present circumstances no Japanese leader or group of leaders could reverse the expansionist program and hope to survive.

Our own policy of unhurried but of inexorable determination in meeting every Japanese step with some step of our own has been eminently wise, and that policy has sunk deep into Japanese consciousness. But while important elements among the Japanese people deplore the course which their leaders are taking, those elements are nevertheless inarticulate and powerless and are likely to remain so. Meanwhile the Germans here are working overtime to push Japan into war with us. I have told Matsuoka point blank that his country is heading for disaster. He has at least seen that his efforts to intimidate us have fallen flat and have had an effect precisely the reverse of that intended.

It therefore appears that sooner or later, unless we are prepared, with General Hugh Johnson, to withdraw bag and baggage from the entire sphere of "Greater East Asia including the South Seas" (which God forbid), we are bound eventually to come to a head-on clash with Japan.

A progressively firm policy on our part will entail inevitable risks - especially risks of sudden uncalculated strokes such as the sinking of the PANAY which might enflame the American people - but in my opinion those risks are less in degree than the far greater future dangers which we would face if we were to follow a policy of *laissez-faire*.

In

In other words, the risks of not taking positive measures to maintain our future security are likely to be much greater than the risks of taking positive measures as the southward advance proceeds. So far as I am aware, the great majority of the American people are in a mood for vigorous action. The principal point at issue, as I see it, is not whether we must call a halt to the Japanese program, but when.

It is important constantly to bear in mind the fact that if we take measures "short of war" with no real intention to carry those measures to their final conclusion if necessary, such lack of intention will be all too obvious to the Japanese who will proceed undeterred, and even with greater incentive, on their way. Only if they become certain that we mean to fight if called upon to do so will our preliminary measures stand some chance of proving effective and of removing the necessity for war, - the old story of Sir Edward Grey in 1914.

If by such action we can bring about the eventual discrediting of Japan's present leaders, a regeneration of thought may ultimately take shape in this country, permitting the resumption of normal relations with us and leading to a readjustment of the whole Pacific problem.

In a nutshell that is about the way I regard the present and future situation. No doubt you have seen some of my telegrams which have tried to paint the picture as clearly as has been possible at this post where we have to fumble and grope for accurate information, simply because among the

Japanese

Japanese themselves the right hand often doesn't know what the left hand is doing. Their so-called "New Structure" is in an awful mess and the bickering and controversy that go on within the Government itself are past belief. Every new totalitarian step is clothed in some righteous-sounding slogan. This, indeed, is not the Japan that we have known and loved.

If you are willing to give me even a cue to your thoughts, either in a personal ultra-confidential letter or orally by some trustworthy person coming out here, it will be of tremendous help.

I cabled you my enthusiastic and affectionate congratulations on your re-election. You are playing a masterly hand in our foreign affairs and I am profoundly thankful that the country is not to be deprived of your clear vision, determination and splendid courage in piloting the old ship of state.

Faithfully yours,

JOSEPH C. GREW

C.F. State
European War

December 30, 1940

*"S.W.
O.K.
F.R.R."*

My dear Mr. President:

In accordance with our conversation of this morning, I have redrafted the proposed message for you to send to Mr. Churchill. Both Secretary Hull and Norman Davis are in accord with the redraft.

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If this meets with your approval, will you let me have it back and I will then have it sent immediately to our Embassy in London.

Believe me

Faithfully yours,

Sumner Welles

Enclosure.

The President,
The White House.

x C.F. State

December 30, 1940

AMERICAN EMBASSY

LONDON (ENGLAND).

[REDACTED]

Please communicate the following message from the President to the former naval person:

QUOTE For some time I have thought that for humanitarian and also political reasons limited quantities of milk and vitamin concentrates for children should be sent to unoccupied France to be distributed under the strict control and supervision of the American Red Cross. I discussed this matter with Lord Lothian before his death and Norman Davis also submitted to him a proposal on behalf of the American Red Cross which Lothian recommended to your Government. The British blockade authorities, while expressing sympathy with the idea, refused to permit the Red Cross to send even limited quantities of milk for children on the ground that it would be difficult to make a distinction between occupied and unoccupied territories; that it would weaken the blockade to make an exception for

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unoccupied France; and that British public opinion would be hostile.

My belief is that it is logical and expedient to make a distinction between occupied and unoccupied territories. This distinction would apply to unoccupied France and likewise, of course, to Spain. I know you will appreciate that this Government has not the slightest intention of undertaking any policy which would weaken or militate against the efficacy of the British blockade. It is Germany's responsibility to feed those in territories occupied by German forces and it is difficult to see how any scheme can be devised for others to feed them without aiding Germany directly or indirectly.

Our information is that in addition to certain medical supplies there is a serious need of milk and vitamin concentrates for children and also layettes in unoccupied France and I am convinced that to supply these supplies under definite conditions and adequate safeguards would not benefit Germany but would help to win over the French people whose sentiment is turning more favorably towards Great Britain and becoming more hostile to joining with Germany. We are making every effort with the

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Vichy Government to hold them in line but it would strengthen our hand materially to be able to assure them of limited assistance as long as the Vichy Government is friendly to us and refuses to assist Germany against Great Britain.

I think it would be an expedient and wise policy for the American Red Cross to send one ship immediately to Seville and to Barcelona and thence to Marseille. Roughly two-thirds of the cargo would comprise flour and milk for distribution through the American Red Cross in Spain to the Spanish civilian population, and the remaining third of the cargo would be unloaded at Marseille and would comprise medical supplies, milk, vitamin concentrates, and layettes for the children of unoccupied France for distribution under the supervision of the American Red Cross. If the despatch of this first ship is attended with satisfactory results, other individual ships could be sent subsequently. In this way we could, of course, keep control of the situation. At no time would there be despatched to unoccupied France or to Spain enough supplies to be of any appreciable assistance to Germany if she should occupy those regions.

As you know, our desire to afford relief to the civilian population in Spain is in part due to the desire expressed by your Government that we should take such action. I feel that it is of the utmost importance to make every practical effort to keep Spain out of the war or from aiding the Axis powers. If the policy of affording relief is to be undertaken, I am convinced that it should be undertaken now without further delay. Furthermore, if Spain is given assistance and this Government is not able to send even milk for the relief of the children in unoccupied France, the distinction made between the two countries by this Government would, in my judgment, help to weaken the resistance of the Vichy Government to the pressure now being exercised upon that government by Germany. To make these isolated and conditional exceptions to your Government's general blockade policy would not in my judgment weaken the blockade nor jeopardize its successful maintenance. UNQUOTE

If practicable and desirable, packages for British and other prisoners of war in Germany could likewise be included in the shipment and be unloaded at Marseille for transshipment to Geneva. UNQUOTE

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"Roosevelt"