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Personal
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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

February 16, 1939

My dear Mr. President:

In response to your memorandum of February 6, 1939, Mr. Welles and I agree that, in as much as Mussolini's letter was merely a reply to your letter, no further message to him is necessary at this time.

Faithfully yours,

Cordeell Hull

The President,
The White House.

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Confidential

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

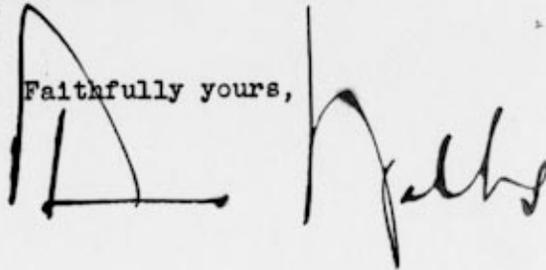
March 23, 1939

My dear Mr. President:

I am sending you herewith the memorandum I dictated last night of the conversation you had yesterday afternoon with the Italian Ambassador. I am only sorry that a stenographer was not present. I wish it were possible for me to reproduce with complete accuracy all that you said and the way in which you said it because it was one of the most effective presentations I have ever heard. However, I believe the memorandum I am sending you covers the main points contained in your conversation.

Believe me

Faithfully yours,



Enclosure.

The President,
The White House.

P&F Italy

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: March 22, 1939

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT:

PARTICIPANTS: The President; Don Ascanio dei Principi Colonna,
Royal Italian Ambassador; Mr. Welles, Acting Secretary.

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After the President concluded his formal reception of the Italian Ambassador this afternoon, he asked the Ambassador to come into the Red Room with him in order that they might have a personal conversation at which I was present.

The President commenced the conversation by asking the Ambassador if he had not met him before in Paris since his face was familiar to him, and the Ambassador replied that he had been in Paris at the beginning of the Peace Conference as Secretary to Signor Scialoja who was then Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The President said he was particularly glad to welcome the Ambassador to Washington.

The President then continued by stating that the Ambassador, of course, had not yet been here long enough to familiarize himself with conditions in the United States but that he wanted him to realize that with the complete liberty of the press which existed in this country there was a great deal that was said that did not truly represent American public opinion. He said he thought that often a false impression was created in European countries as to the importance of press statements or the utterances of public officials and the President referred specifically to a speech which might be made by an individual senator and which might be regarded as important, for example, in Germany, but which in reality in no sense reflected the bulk of public opinion in the United States. The President said that the Ambassador should realize that in this country of ours of 130 millions of people, there were represented large elements which might in their origin be Italian, or English, or German, but that the important fact to remember was that the United States was in fact united, with the immense majority of the people speaking not only the same language, but sharing the same thoughts. The President said that at the present time the people of the United States felt very deeply with regard to the situation in Europe and that there was no question that

if war broke out as a result of a policy of military aggression on the part of one country or group of countries against non-aggressive European nations, the sympathies of the American people would be overwhelmingly with the latter. The President stated that it was not a question of an insistence by this people on the form of government which European peoples should have, but on the contrary a deep-rooted opposition to the carrying out on the part of any nation of a policy of military domination which jeopardized the peace of the world and, consequently, the vital interests of all peace-loving peoples. The President said that in a very real sense the question at issue was a moral issue and that he believed that the influence of the United States was effective not only because of the size of the United States and the number of its people and not only because of its capacity for turning out manufactured goods and for the raw materials which it could offer, but also because of the moral influence which it represented.

The President then turned personally to the Ambassador and said that he knew well of the close connection between the Ambassador's family and the Vatican and that the same principles which were upheld by the Catholic church and by the Pope were the principles which were

upheld by the Government and the people of the United States and that he believed that those principles would be triumphant.

The President then stated that he believed that Il Duce had a very great opportunity presented to him today to prevent the world from being thrown into war. He said that in the first place there was no question that the neutrality legislation in the United States would be speedily amended and that should war break out for the reasons he had previously indicated, the people of the United States would certainly insist that such assistance as this country could render the countries which were the object of aggression in Europe be rendered to the fullest extent possible. The President said that Il Duce must surely bear in mind the fact that Europe could not contain two overlords at the same time and that if Hitler persisted in his present course he would undoubtedly throw over Mussolini at any moment that seemed to him expedient, but from the larger standpoint, the President believed that if Mussolini were now to delay forcing the issue he would not only be counted responsible for averting the outbreak of a European war, but would also have the opportunity to gain any just concessions which he believed essential as the result of discussions which could readily take place around a

council table. The President said that he regretted that he himself had not had the opportunity of personally meeting and of talking with Mussolini because he believed that such an opportunity for discussion between the two might be useful and because he believed they would find that they "spoke the same language". The President said that the people of the United States possessed only the most friendly and kindest feelings for the Italian people as they had done over a period of many generations. At this point the Ambassador interjected that the Italian people possessed exactly the same feeling for the people of the United States. The President then continued by saying that since this was the case, it was very much to be hoped that the United States would not find itself in a position where it had to feel unsympathetic or opposed to the position which might be assumed by Italy. The President reiterated that Mussolini had a great opportunity by holding off until such time as a reasonable adjustment of the concessions to which he felt Italy was entitled could be worked out through conference and discussion to avert a European conflagration which would only prove disastrous to Italy herself as well as to the other powers involved.

The President said that he did not have in mind any great conference such as that of Versailles or of

Vienna, but discussions among a limited number of people, and that while he himself, the President, would not take the initiative because he did not desire to have it thought by the European powers that the United States was "butting into European affairs", he did feel that Mussolini himself should take the initiative. The President stated that if Mussolini took the initiative in the manner he proposed he could be sure that he himself, the President, would lend his support to the finding of a reasonable solution in every possible manner.

The Ambassador inquired whether the President would not put this message in writing. The President replied that he thought it was very much easier to explain the thoughts that he had orally to Mussolini's representative in Washington as he had done, but that the Ambassador was, of course, at entire liberty to inform Mussolini immediately of his conversation with the President.

The attitude of the Ambassador changed completely during the course of his conversation with the President. It was perfectly evident from watching his face that he sympathized completely with the suggestions made by the President.

The President concluded the conversation by saying that if at any time the Ambassador received a personal

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message for the President from Mussolini he had only
to let me know and I would inform the President accord-
ingly.

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Copy, FDRL, 1-23-56, nvm

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington

January 19, 1956

Dear Mr. Kahn:

With regard to our previous correspondence on memoranda by Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles of conversations between President Roosevelt and the Italian Ambassador on March 23, 1939, and May 2, 1940, I can now report that having just received clearance from the appropriate area office of the Department of State, we will proceed to publish the documents in "Foreign Relations", 1939 and 1940. You may assume that the decision to publish and clearance to do so are the equivalent of declassification.

Sincerely yours,

Sgd. E. R. Perkins
E. R. Perkins
Chief, Foreign Relations Branch
Historical Division

Mr. Herman Kahn, Director,
The Franklin D. Roosevelt Library,
Hyde Park, New York.