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German White Book - Documents

Concerning the Last Phase of the German-Polish Crisis

Documents 18 through 26 (final)

18. Note handed to the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs by the British Ambassador on September 1, 1939, at 9:30 p. m.

Berlin, September 1, 1939.

Your Excellency:

On the instructions of His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs I have the honor to make the following communication.

Early this morning the German Chancellor issued a proclamation to the German Army which indicated clearly that he was about to attack Poland.

Information which has reached His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government indicates that German troops have crossed the Polish frontier and that attacks on Polish towns are proceeding.

In these circumstances it appears to the Governments of the United Kingdom and France that by their action the German Government have created conditions (viz. and aggressive act of force against Poland threatening the independence of Poland) which calls for the implementation by the Governments of the United Kingdom and France of the undertaking to Poland to come to her assistance.

I am accordingly to inform Your excellency that unless the German government are prepared to give His Majesty's Government satisfactory assurances that the German Government have suspended all aggressive action against Poland and are prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from Polish territory, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom will without hesitation fulfill their obligations to Poland.

I avail myself of this opportunity re renew to your Excellency the assurance of my highest consideration.

(Signed): NEVILE HENDERSON

19. Note handed to the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs by the French Ambassador on September 1, 1939, at 10 p. m.

(Translation)

Berlin, September 1, 1939

Your Excellency:

On the instructions of the French Minister for Foreign Affairs I have the honor to make the following communication.

Early this morning the German Chancellor issued a proclamation to the German Army which indicated clearly that he was about to attack Poland.

Information which has reached the French Government and His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom indicates that German troops have crossed the Polish Frontier and that attacks on Polish towns are proceeding

In these circumstances it appears to the Governments of France and the United Kingdom that by their action the German Government have created conditions (viz. and aggressive act of force against Poland threatening the independence of Poland) which calls for the implementation by the Governments of France and the United Kingdom of the undertaking to Poland to come to her assistance.

I am accordingly to inform Your excellency that unless the German government are prepared

to give His Majesty's Government satisfactory assurances that the German Government have suspended all aggressive action against Poland and are prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from Polish territory, the French government will without hesitation fulfill their obligation to Poland.

I avail myself of this opportunity to renew to your Excellency the assurance of my highest consideration.

(Signed): COULONDRE

20. Communication handed to the German Foreign Office by the Italian Ambassador on the morning of September 2, 1939.

(Translation)

For your information Italy communicates to you, naturally leaving every decision to the Fuhrer, that she is still in a position to obtain the consent of France, England and Poland to a conference on the following basis:

1. An armistice leaving the armies where they now are;
2. The calling of a conference within two or three days;
3. A solution of the Polish-German conflict, which, as matters lie today, would certainly be favorable to Germany.

This idea, which originated with the Duce, is today particularly advocated by France.

21. Information from the Havas News Agency on September 2, 1939

(Translation)

The French government as well as several other Governments have been informed of an Italian proposal for a settlement of the European difficulties. After discussing the proposal the French Government gave a reply in the affirmative.

22. Extract from a Declaration made by the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the House of Lords on the afternoon of September 2, 1939*

". . . . Up to the present no reply has been received to the warning message delivered to Germany last night.

It was possible that delay had been due to proposals put forward by the Italian Government that hostilities should cease and that there would be immediately a conference between Great Britain, France, Poland, Germany and Italy.

The British Government would not find it possible to take part in a conference when Poland was being subjected to invasion and her towns were under bombardment and Danzig had been made the subject of unilateral settlement by force. . ."

*) According to the wording appearing in "The Observer" of September 3, 1939. A similar declaration was made at the same time by the British Prime Minister in the House of Commons.

23. Note handed to the German Foreign Office by the British Ambassador on September 3, 1939, at 9. a.m.

September 3, 1939.

Your Excellency:

In the communication which I had the honor to make to you on September 1st I informed you on the instructions of His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that, unless the German Government were prepared to give His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom satisfactory assurances that the German Government had suspended all aggressive action against Poland and were prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from Polish territory, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom would without hesitation fulfill their obligations to Poland.

Although this communication was made more than twenty-four hours ago, no reply has been received, but German attacks upon Poland have been continued and intensified.

I have accordingly the honor to inform you that unless not later than 11 a.m. British Summer Time today, September 3rd, satisfactory assurance to the above effect has been given by the German Government and has reached His Majesty's Government in London, a state of war will exist between the two countries as from that hour.

I avail myself of this opportunity. . . .

(Signed) NEVILE HENDERSON

24. Note from the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs handed to the German Charge d'Affairs in London on September 3, 1939, at 11:15 s.m.

September 3, 1939.

Sir:

On September 1st H.M. Ambassador in Berlin acting upon my instructions informed the same Government that unless they were prepared to give H.M. Government in the United Kingdom satisfactory assurances that the German Government have suspended all aggressive actions against Poland and were prepared promptly to withdraw their forces from Polish territory, H. M. Government in the United Kingdom would without hesitation fulfill their obligations to Poland.

At 9 a.m. this morning H. M. Ambassador in Berlin acting upon my instructions informed the German Government that unless not later than 11 a.m. British summer time, today, September 3rd, satisfactory assurance to the above effect has been given by the German Government and has reached H. M. Government in London a state of war would exist between the two countries as from that hour.

No such assurances having been received I have the honor to inform you that a state of war exists between the two countries as from 11 a. m. today, September 3rd.

I have the honor. . . .

(Signed) HALIFAX

25. Memorandum from the German Government handed to the British

Ambassador by the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs, September 3, 1939, at 11:30 a.m.

(Translation)

The Reich government acknowledges receipt of the British Government's ultimatum of September 3, 1939, to which the Reich Government has the honor to reply as follows:

- 1) The Reich Government and the German people refuse to be handed, to accept, and still less, to comply with demands amounting to an ultimatum made by the British Government.
- 2) For many months past, a state of war has actually prevailed along our eastern border. Every since the Treaty of Versailles rent Germany in two, all subsequent German Governments were denied any peaceful Settlement.

Since 1933, the National socialist Government have also tried again and again by way of peaceful negotiations to do away with the worst oppression and violations of law perpetrated by that treaty.

Primarily it has been the British Government who, by their intransigent attitude, have frustrated any practical revision. Had it not been for the interference on the part of the British Government, a reasonable solution, doing justice to either party, would undoubtedly have been arrive at between Germany and Poland, a fact which the Reich Government and the German people are convinced of.

For Germany had no intention of destroying Poland, nor did she ever demand Poland's destruction. All that the Reich demanded was the revision of those articles in the Treaty of Versailles which sensible statesmen of all nations, already when the treaty was drawn up, termed unbearable for any length of time -- unbearable both for a great nation and for the entire political and economic interest of Eastern Europe, and therefore impossible.

Even British statesmen declared specifically that the terms which Germany was forced to accept in the East held the seed of future wars. To go away with this danger has been the desire of every German Government, and in particular the aim of the New National Socialist Government of the German people.

The policy of the British Cabinet is to blame for the fact that a peaceful revision has not been reached.

- 3) The British government -- an unprecedented occurrence in history -- has given Poland full

power with regard to any action against Germany which she might intend to undertake.

The British Government gave the Polish Government the assurance of their military support in any circumstance, in case Germany should commence hostilities in reply to any provocation or attack.

Thereupon Polish acts of terror against Germans domiciled in the districts torn from Germany immediately assumed intolerable proportions. The treatment to which the Free City of Danzig was subjected was in contravention to all legal provision; it was first threatened with economic ruin and submitted to customs restrictions, and finally encircled by military forces and throttled by transport restriction.

Every one of these infringements of the Danzig Statute was fully known to, and approved by, the British Government, and backed by the blank cheque given to Poland.

The German Government, although greatly distressed by the sufferings of the German minority subjected to atrocities and inhuman treatment by the Poles, nevertheless looked on in patience for five months without once undertaking even the slightest aggressive action of a similar nature against Poland.

Germany merely warned Poland that these actions would not be tolerated in the long run and that she was determined, in the event of no other help forthcoming for the population concerned, to take the matter in hand herself.

The British Government was fully aware of all that was going on. It would have been an easy matter for them to use their great influence in Warsaw to exhort those in authority to conform to the laws of justice and humanity, and to fulfill their existing obligations.

The British Government did not see fit to do anything of the kind. On the contrary, by constantly stressing the fact of their duty to assist Poland under all circumstances, they clearly encouraged Poland to continue in her criminal attitude which still might have saved the peace of Europe, although the Reich Government had expressed their readiness to accept such proposal.

The British Government are thus responsible for all the misery and suffering that has overtaken now, or is about to overtake, so many peoples.

4) Now that all attempts to find and settle on a peaceful solution have been frustrated owing to the intransigent attitude of the Polish Government as shielded by Great Britain; now that for many months already conditions similar to civil war on the eastern frontiers of the Reich have gradually -- without any objection on the part of the British Government -- assumed the character

of open attacks on Reich territory, the Reich Government have decided to put an end to the continued menace, at first from outside, but later also at home, against the peace of the German nation, a situation no Great Power can be expected to bear with.

In order to defend the peace, the security and the honor of the German Reich, the Reich Government have decided to resort to the only means now left to them, since the Governments of the Democracies have wantonly frustrated all other possibilities of revision.

They have replied to the last Polish attacks threatening Reich territory with similar measures. The Reich Government is not willing, on account of any British intentions or obligations, to tolerate in the East of the Reich conditions similar to those prevailing in the British Protectorate of Palestine.

The German people, however, is certainly not willing to submit to ill-treatment by Poland.

5) the Reich government therefore reject any attempt to force Germany, by an ultimative demand, to withdraw her troops, called up for the purpose of protecting the Reich, and thus to put up once more with the former unrest and injustice. The treat that war would otherwise be waged against Germany coincides with the intentions, for many years proclaimed, of numerous British politicians.

Innumerable times the Reich Government and the German people have assured the British people of their desire for an understanding and even close friendship with them. If the British Government have hitherto rejected these offers and now reply to them with n open threat of war, the responsibility for this lies not with the German nation and its Government, but exclusively with the British Cabinet, especially with those men who for years have preached the destruction and extermination of the German people.

The German people and the German Government do not intend, as does Great Britain, to rule the world, but they are determined to defend their own freedom, their independence and very life.

We take note of the intentions made known to us by Mr. King Hall on behalf of the British government, to deal the German nation a still more crushing blow than did the Treaty of Versailles and shall therefore reply to any act of aggression on the part of Great Britain with the same weapons and in the same way.

Berlin, September 3, 1939.

26. Note handed to the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs by the French Ambassador on September 3, 1939, at 12:20 p.m.

(Translation)

Berlin, September 3, 1939.

Your Excellency:

As I received no satisfactory reply from the Reich Government at noon on September 3rd to the Note which I handed to you on September 1st at 10 p.m. I have the honor of making the following communication to you on behalf of my Government:

The Government of the French Republic consider it their duty to remind you for the last time of the grave responsibility which the Reich Government incurred when they opened hostilities against Poland without a declaration of war and did not adopt the proposal of the Government of the French Republic and that of His Britanic Majesty to desist from every aggressive action against Poland and to declare themselves ready immediately to withdraw their troops from Polish territory.

The Government of the Republic therefore have the honor of informing the Reich Government that they are themselves in duty bound to fulfill the contractual obligations, from today, September 3rd, 5 p.m. onwards, which they have entered into with Poland and with which the German Government are acquainted.

Permit me

(signed) COULONDRE

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