

[Back to HOW WARS ARE MADE](#) | [Issues index](#) | [CDR Home](#)

German White Book - Documents

Concerning the Last Phase of the German-Polish Crisis

[Documents 9 through 13 \(of 26\)](#)

9. Letter of the French Premier to the Fuhrer, August 26, 1939

(Translation)

Paris, August 29, 1939.

Your Excellency:

The French Ambassador in Berlin has brought your personal message to my knowledge.

At an hour when you speak of the gravest responsibility which two Heads of Government can be asked to take, namely, that of shedding the blood of two great peoples desiring only peace and work, I owe it to you personally and to our respective nations to state that the fate of peace still rests in your hands.

You cannot doubt my feelings towards Germany, or the friendly feelings of France for your nation. No Frenchman has done more than I have to ensure not only peace between our two peoples, but also sincere cooperation in your own interests as well as in those of Europe and of the world.

Unless you are prepared to credit the French nation with a lower ideal of honor than the one with which I credit the German people, you cannot doubt that France will faithfully fulfill her obligations towards other powers which, like Poland, are, I am convinced, desirous of living at peace with Germany.

Both convictions are fully compatible with one another.

To this day there is nothing which might prevent a peaceful solution of the international crisis in a spirit of honor and dignity for all nations as long as the same will for peace prevails on all sides.

Together with the good will of France I proclaim that of all her allies. I personally guarantee the readiness always shown by Poland to have mutual recourse to methods of free conciliation such as can be envisaged between the Governments of two sovereign nations. With a perfectly clear conscience I can give you an assurance that among the differences which have arisen between Germany and Poland with regard to the Danzig question, there is not a single one which could not be submitted to such a procedure with a view to finding a just and peaceful solution.

Upon my honor I can also state that in the clear and sincere solidarity of France with Poland and her allies there is nothing that might in any way impair the peaceful disposition of my country. This solidarity has never prevented us from supporting this peaceful disposition in Poland, and it does not do so today.

At so critical a moment I sincerely believe that no noble-minded person could understand how a war of destruction could be waged without a final attempt at a peaceful settlement between Germany and Poland having been undertaken. Your desire for peace could exercise its influence with full determination towards this end without detracting anything from Germany's honor. As Head of the French Government, desirous of attaining full harmony between the French and the German nation, yet bound on the other hand to Poland by ties of friendship and my pledged word, I am prepared to make every effort that an honorable man can make to bring this endeavor to a successful end.

Like myself you were a soldier in the last war. You know as well as I do the feelings of disgust and universal condemnation which the destruction caused by war left in the conscience of all nations, irrespective of its issue. The idea which I cherish of your great part as leader of the German nation on the road to peace towards the fulfillment of its tasks in the common effort towards civilization, prompts me to ask you for an answer to this my proposal.

Should French and German blood once more have to flow, just as it did twenty-five years ago, in an even longer and more murderous war, each nation will fight fully confident of its ultimate victory. Yet we can be sure that ruin and barbarity will be the most certain victors.'

(Signed) DALADIER

10. The Fuhrer's Letter in reply to the French Premier, August 27, 1939.

Berlin, August 27, 1939

Your Excellency:

I appreciate the concern you have expressed. I have always been equally conscious of the grave responsibility placed upon those who must decide the fate of nations. As an ex-soldier, I know as well as you do the horrors of war. This spirit and knowledge have guided me in a sincere endeavor to remove all causes of conflict between our two nations.

I once told the French people quite frankly that the return of the Saar territory would be the basis for the achievement of this aim. Once that territory was returned I immediately solemnly renounced any further claims which might affect France.

The German people approved of my attitude. As you were able to see for yourself when you were in Germany last, the German people, conscious of the way they themselves behaved, did not and still do not entertain any animosity or still less hatred against their former brave opponents. On the contrary; once peace was definitely established along our western frontier, there came an increasing sympathy, at any rate on the part of the German nation -- a sympathy markedly demonstrated on many occasions.

The construction of the great western fortifications which have cost and will still cost many billion Marks, is documentary evidence that Germany has accepted and fixed the final frontier of the Reich. In doing so, the German people renounced two provinces which once belonged to the old German Reich, were later on regained at the price of many lives, and were finally defended at the price of still more lives.

Your Excellency will admit that this renunciation was not merely a gesture for tactical reasons but a decision confirmed by all our subsequent measures.

You cannot, Excellency, cite a single instance in which this final settlement of the German frontier in the West has ever been disputed by one line or word. I believed that by this renunciation and by this attitude every possible cause of conflict between our two nations, which might have led to a repetition of the tragic years of 1914 to 1918, had been eliminated.

This voluntary limitation of German claims in the West cannot however be regarded as an acceptance of the Dictate of Versailles in all other fields.

Year by year I have tried earnestly to achieve the revision of at least the most impossible and most unbearable of all the conditions of this Dictate through negotiation. This proved impossible. Many enlightened men of all nations believed and were convinced that revision was bound to come. Whatever objection may be raised against my methods, whatever fault may be found with them, it cannot be overlooked or denied that I succeeded without any more bloodshed in finding solutions which were in many cases satisfactory not only for Germany.

By the manner in which these solutions were accomplished, statesmen of other nations were relieved of their obligation, which they often found impossible to fulfill, of having to accept responsibility for this revision before their own people.

One thing I feel sure Your Excellency will admit, namely, that the revision was bound to come. The Dictate of Versailles was unbearable. No Frenchman with a sense of honor and certainly not you, M. Daladier, would have acted differently in a similar position than I did. I therefore tried to remove this most insane stipulation of the Dictate of Versailles. I made an offer to the Polish Government which actually shocked the German people.

No one but I could have dared to come forward with such a proposal. Therefore I could only make it once. I am firmly convinced that if Poland at that time had been advised to take a sensible course instead of being incited by a wild campaign of the British press against Germany, accompanied by rumors of German mobilization, then Europe would today be able to enjoy a state of profound peace for the next twenty-five years.

Actually, it was the lie about German aggression that excited public opinion in Poland; the Polish Government were handicapped in making necessary and clear decisions and, above all, their judgment on the extent of Poland's possibilities was clouded by the subsequent promise of a guarantee.

[The guarantee England made to Poland that England would come to Poland's defense if hostilities ensued. It was, as Hitler said, "a blank cheque for the Polish government to continue its abuse and oppression of the Germans caught in that 'country' -- Poland -- that was created at Versailles.]

The Polish Government rejected the proposals.

Firmly convinced that Britain and France would now fight for Poland, Polish public opinion began to raise demands which might best be described as sheer lunacy were they not so extraordinarily dangerous. At that time unbearable terrorism set in; physical and economic oppression of the more than one and a half millions of Germans living in the territories severed

from the Reich. I do not intent to speak of the atrocities which have occurred.

Even in Danzig, the outrages committed by the Polish authorities fully created the impression that the city was apparently hopelessly delivered up to the arbitrary action of a power that is foreign to the national character of the city and its population.

May I ask you, M. Daladier, how you as a Frenchman would act if, by the unfortunate ending of a bravely-fought war, one of your provinces were separated by a corridor in the possession of an alien power, and a large city -- let us say Marseilles -- were prevented from bearing allegiance to France, while Frenchmen in this territory were being persecuted, beaten, maltreated and even murdered in a bestial manner.

You are a Frenchman, M. Daladier, and I therefore know how you would act. I am a German, M. Daladier, and you will not doubt my sense of honor and my sense of duty which make me act in exactly the same way.

If you had to face a calamity such as confronts us, would you, M. Daladier, understand how Germany, for no reason at all, could use her influence to ensure that such a corridor through France should remain?

That the stolen territories should not be returned, and that Marseilles should be forbidden to join France?

I certainly cannot imagine Germany fighting you for such a cause. I, for Germany, renounced our claim to Alsace-Lorraine in order to avoid further bloodshed. Still less would we shed blood in order to maintain such an injustice as I have pictured, which would be as intolerable for you as it would be meaningless for us.

My feelings on everything expressed in your letter, M. Daladier, are the same as yours. Perhaps we, as ex-soldiers, should readily understand each other on many points. Yet I would ask you to appreciate also this: namely, that no nation with a sense of honor can ever give up almost two million people and see them maltreated on its own frontiers.

I therefore formulated a clear demand: Danzig and the Corridor must return to Germany. The Macedonian conditions prevailing along our eastern frontier must cease. I see no possibility of persuading Poland, who deems herself safe from attack by virtue of the guarantees given to her, to agree to a peaceful solution.

Unless we are determined under the circumstances to solve the question one way or the other, I would despair of an honorable future for my country.

If fate decrees that our two peoples should fight one another once more over this question, it would be from different motives. I for my part, M. Daladier, would fight with my people for the reparation of an injustice, while the others would fight for its retention.

This is all the more tragic in view of the fact that many great men of your nation have long since recognized the folly of the solution found in 1919 and the impossibility of keeping it up for ever. I am fully conscious of the grave consequences which such a conflict would involve. But I think that Poland would suffer most, for whatever the issue of such a war, the Polish State of today would in any case be lost.

That our two peoples should now engage in another murderous war of destruction causes me as much pain as it does you, M. Daladier. Unfortunately, as stated earlier in my letter, I see no possibility open to us of influencing Poland to take a saner attitude and thus to remedy a situation which is unbearable for both the German people and the German Reich.

(signed) ADOLF HITLER.

11. Memorandum from the British Government handed to the Fuhrer by the British Ambassador on August 28, 1939, at 10:30 p. m.

1. His Majesty's Government have received the message conveyed to them from the German Chancellor by H.M. Ambassador in Berlin and have considered it with the care which it demands.

They note the Chancellor's expression of his desire to make friendship the basis of the relations between Germany and the British Empire and they fully share this desire. they believe with him that if a complete and lasting understanding between the two countries could be established it would bring untold blessings to both peoples.

2. The Chancellor's message deals with two groups of questions: -- those which are the matters now in dispute between Germany and Poland, and those affecting the ultimate relations of Germany and Great Britain.

In connection with these last, His Majesty's Government observe that the German Chancellor has indicated certain proposals which, subject to one condition, he would be prepared to make to the British Government for a general understanding. These proposals are of course stated in very general form and would require closer definition, but His Majesty's Government are fully prepared to take them, with some additions, as subjects for discussion and they would be ready, if

the differences between Germany and Poland are peacefully composed, to proceed so soon as practicable to such discussion with a sincere desire to reach agreement.

3. The condition which the German Chancellor lays down is that there must first be a settlement of the differences between Germany and Poland. As to that, His Majesty's Government entirely agree. Everything, however, turns upon the nature of the settlement and the method by which it is to be reached. On these points, the importance of which cannot be absent from the Chancellor's mind, his message is silent, and His Majesty's Government will be aware that **His Majesty's Government have obligations to Poland by which they are bound and which they intend to honor.**

They could not, for any advantage offered to Great Britain, acquiesce in a settlement which put in jeopardy the independence of a State to whom they have given their guarantee.

4. In the opinion of His Majesty's Government a reasonable solution for the differences between Germany and Poland could and should be effected by agreement between the two countries on lines which would include the safeguarding of Poland's essential interest, and they recall that in his speech of the 28th of April last the German Chancellor recognized the importance of these interests to Poland.

But as was stated by the Prime Minister in his letter to the German Chancellor of the 22nd of August, His Majesty's Government consider it essential for the success of the discussions which would precede the agreement that it should be understood before hand that any settlement arrived at would be guaranteed by other Powers. His Majesty's Government would be ready if desired to make their contribution to the effective operation of such a guarantee.

In view of His Majesty's Government it follows that the next step should be the initiation of direct discussions between the German and Polish Governments on a basis which would include the principles stated above, namely the safeguarding of Poland's essential interests and the securing of the settlement by an international guarantee.

They have already received a definite assurance from the Polish Government that they are prepared to enter into discussions on this basis, and His Majesty's Government hope the German government would for their part also be willing to agree to this course.

If, as His Majesty's government hope, such discussion let to agreement the way would be open to the negotiation of that wider and more complete understanding between Great Britain and Germany which both countries desire.

5. His Majesty's Government agree with the German Chancellor that one of the principal

dangers in the German-Polish situation arises from the report concerning the treatment of minorities. The present state of tension, with its concomitant frontier incidents, reports of maltreatment and inflammatory propaganda, is a constant danger to peace.

It is manifestly a matter of the utmost urgency that all incidents of the kind should be promptly and rigidly suppressed and that unverified reports should not be allowed to circulate, in order that time may be afforded, without provocation on either side, for a full examination of the possibilities of settlement. His Majesty's Government are confident that both governments concerned are fully alive to these considerations.

6. His Majesty's Government have said enough to make their own attitude plain in the particular matters at issue between Germany and Poland. They trust that the German Chancellor will not think that, because His Majesty's Government are scrupulous concerning their obligations to Poland, they are not anxious to use all their influence to assist the achievement of a solution which may comment itself both to Germany and to Poland.

That such a settlement should be achieved seems to His Majesty's Government essential, not only for reasons directly arising in regard to the settlement itself, but also because of the wider considerations of which the German Chancellor has spoken with such conviction.

7. It is unnecessary in the present reply to stress the advantage of a peaceful settlement over a decision to settle the questions at issue by force of arms. The results of a decision to use force have been clearly set out in the Prime Minister's letter to the Chancellor of the 22nd of August, and His Majesty's Government do not doubt that they are as fully recognized by the Chancellor as by themselves.

On the other hand His Majesty's government, noting with interest the German Chancellor's reference in the message now under consideration to a limitation of armaments, believe that, if a peaceful settlement can be obtained, **the assistance of the world could confidently be anticipated for practical measures to enable the transition from preparation for war to the normal activities of peaceful trade to be safely and smoothly effected.**

8. A just settlement of these questions between Germany and Poland may open the way to world peace. Failure to reach it would ruin the hopes of better understanding between Germany and Great Britain, would bring the two countries into conflict, and might well plunge the whole world into war. Such an outcome would be a calamity without parallel in history.

12. The Fuhrer's Reply to the British Government handed to the British

Ambassador on August 29, 1939, at 6:45 p. m.

(Translation)

August 29, 1939.

The British Ambassador in Berlin has informed the British government of certain suggestions which I felt it incumbent upon me to put forward, in order:

1. to express once more the desire of the German Government for sincere Anglo-German understanding, cooperation and friendship;
2. to leave no room for doubt that such an understanding cannot be purchased at the expense of Germany's renunciation of her vital interests or even by the sacrifice of claims based just as much on general human rights as on the national dignity and honor of our nation.

It was with satisfaction that the German Government learned from the written reply of the British government and the verbal declarations of the British Ambassador, that the British government for their part also prepared to improve Anglo-German relations and to develop and to foster these in the spirit of the German suggestions.

The British government are likewise convinced that the removal of the tension between Germany and Poland, which has become intolerable, is indispensable if this hope is to be realized.

Since the autumn of 1938 and for the last time in March 1939, verbal and written proposals have been submitted to the Polish Government, which in consideration of the friendship then existing between Germany and Poland, might have led to a settlement of the questions under dispute which would have been acceptable to both parties.

The British government are aware that the Polish government saw fit to reject these proposals finally in March of this year. At the same time the Polish government made their rejection a pretext or an occasion for the adoption of military measures which have since then been continued on an ever-increasing scale. Poland had, in fact, mobilized as early as the middle of the month.

In connection with the mobilization, numerous incidents took place in the Free City of Danzig at the instigation of the Polish authorities, and demands of a more or less threatening character amounting to an ultimatum were addressed to the Free city of Danzig. The closing of the frontier,

which was at first in the nature of a custom measure, was afterwards carried out on military lines and was extended to affect traffic with the object of bringing about the political disintegration and the economic ruin of the German community.

Furthermore, the large group of Germans living in Poland was subjected to atrocious and barbarous ill treatment and to other forms of persecution which resulted in some cases in the death by violence of many Germans domiciled there or in their deportation under the most cruel circumstances.

Such a situation is intolerable for a Great Power and has now forced Germany after months of inactive observation to undertake the necessary steps for the protection of her rightful interests. The German Government can only most seriously assure the British Government that that state of affairs has now been reached for which continued acquiescence or even inactive observation is no longer possible.

The demands of the German government imply a revision of the Treaty of Versailles in this area, a fact which was recognized as necessary from the very outset; they constitute the return of Danzig and the Polish Corridor to Germany and the safeguarding of the German minorities domiciled in those territories remaining in Polish possession.

the Reich Government note with satisfaction that the British Government are also convinced on principle that some solution must be found for the state of affairs which has now developed. They further consider they may assume that the British Government entertain no doubt on the fact that this is a state of affairs which can no longer be remedied in a matter of days or even weeks but for which perhaps only a few hours yet remain. For in view of the disorganized state of Poland we must at any moment be prepared for the possibility of events occurring which Germany could not possibly tolerate.

If the British Government still believe that these grave differences can be solved by direct negotiations, the Reich Government on their part regret at the outset that they are unable to share such an opinion. They have already tried to open up a way for peaceful negotiations of this nature, without meeting with the support of the Polish government, and only seeing their efforts rejected by the abrupt initiation of measures of a military character in accordance with the general development indicated above.

There are two factors which the British Government consider important:

1. to remove most speedily the imminent danger of a conflagration by means of direct negotiations, and

2. to give the necessary economic and political safeguards by means of international guarantees for the future existence of the remaining Polish State.

Despite their skeptical judgment of the prospects of such direct negotiations, the Reich Government are nevertheless prepared to accept the English proposal, and to enter into direct discussions. They do so solely because -- as already emphasized -- the written communication from the British Government, which they have received, gives them the impression that the latter also desire a friendly agreement along the lines indicated to their Ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson.

The German Government desire in this way to give to the British Government and to the British people a proof of the sincerity of the German intention of arriving at a state of permanent friendship with Great Britain.

The Reich Government nevertheless feel bound to point out to the British Government that in the case of a reorganization of the territorial condition in Poland, the Reich Government are no longer in a position to take upon themselves any guarantees, or to participate in any guarantees, without the cooperation of the U.S.S.R.

The Reich Government in their proposals moreover never had the intentions of attacking vital Polish interests or of questioning the existence of an independent Polish state. Under these conditions, the Reich Government therefore agree to accept the proposed intermediation of the British Government to send to Berlin a Polish representative invested with plenipotentiary powers. They expect his arrival on Wednesday, August 30, 1939.

The Reich Government will immediately draft the proposals for a solution acceptable to them and, if possible, will make such proposals also available for the British government before the Polish negotiator arrives.

13. Telephone Message from the German Charge d'Affairs in Warsaw to the German Foreign Office on August 30, 1939, at 5:30 p. m.

(Translation)

Notices ordering a general mobilization have been posted in Poland for one hour. The first day of mobilization is August 31st; everybody in possession of a white mobilization card must report at once.

[Next](#) - Documents 14 through 16 (of 26)

[Back to HOW WARS ARE MADE](#) | [Issues index](#) | [CDR Home](#)