

Germany: activities in Africa 1045/5/39

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No. 752.

FOREIGN OFFICE, S.W.1.

(J 2800/1495/24).

18th July, 1939.

Confidential.



*New Ministry letter 578
Mr. A. ... 7/5.*

1045/4/m

1045/4

Sir,

With reference to my despatch No. 708 of the 11th July regarding the position of Liberia in the event of aggression, I have to inform Your Excellency that the Counsellor of the United States Embassy called at this department on Saturday, 8th July to discuss the recent enquiry of the Liberian Government as to whether any promise of assistance could be given to Liberia by His Majesty's Government should she be the victim of aggression.

2. Mr. Herschel Johnson said that the United States Ambassador had received instructions from the State Department to enquire whether any decision had yet been reached as regards the reply to be returned to the above mentioned enquiry of the Liberian Minister. Mr. Johnson was informed that on the 5th July the Liberian Minister had been told that "His Majesty's Government could not remain indifferent if Liberia were the victim of unwarranted aggression which might have for its objective the establishment of a foreign Power on her territory". The Counsellor said that he thought that this reply would be regarded as highly satisfactory by the State Department. He went on to explain that Liberia is the only country outside the United States of America which interests the negro voters and that the State Department were rather disturbed by the excessive zeal which the French Government had shown

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His Excellency
The Right Honourable
Sir Ronald Lindsay, G.C.M.G., G.C.B.,
etc., etc., etc.,
Washington.

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in responding to the enquiry which the Liberian Government had addressed to them. The State Department did not view with favour the proposal that French black troops and French officers and non-commissioned officers should be sent to Liberia, as they consider that Liberia is unlikely to be the victim of aggression and that these measures would be excessive. He enquired what our views might be.

3. Mr.Herschel Johnson was told that according to the information at our disposal there are about 110 German nationals in Liberia who are shipping agents, small tradespeople, etc., that the country's harbours are bad and that we could see no reason which would lead the German Government to wish to attack Liberia. As regards the French action, our information was that the French Government had offered to lend the Liberian Government a battalion of colonial infantry and to supply officers and equipment to reorganise the Liberian Frontier Force to a strength of about 5,000 men; but that the Liberian Government had refused the offer of the loan of French colonial troops; and that difficulties would probably arise over payment for the services of French officers and for any equipment that might be provided for the Liberian Frontier Force. Mr.Herschel Johnson said that the United States Government did not suspect the French Government of any ulterior political motives, but they wondered why they had responded so promptly and zealously to the enquiry of the Liberian Government. In reply it was stated that for many years past successive French Governments had taken an interest in Liberia as one day they might require transit facilities through that country for
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the hinterland of French Guinea. According to information received from the French Embassy, however, it would appear that the real reason for the activity of the French Government was a desire on the part of M. Mandel to show that France is determined to keep Germany out of Africa, and also to M. Mandel's personal wish to impress the world at large.

4. As the State Department had been disquieted by the somewhat excessive response made by the French Government to Liberia's enquiry, it was thought well to inform Mr.Herschel Johnson in confidence that the Liberian Minister had enquired whether representatives of the Liberian Government could go to Sierra Leone and have discussions with the Governor at Freetown and that this enquiry had been transmitted to the Colonial Office. It was suggested to Mr.Herschel Johnson that in all probability the Liberian Government were perturbed at finding that their conversations with the French Government had not been approved in Washington and that consequently, in order to show the United States Government that they did not intend to become a French protectorate, they wished to have conversations with the authorities in the neighbouring British colony of Sierra Leone. It was hoped that the State Department would not think that His Majesty's Government had any evil designs on Liberia if they acceded to the request of the Liberian Government and authorised the Commander-in-Chief at Sierra Leone to receive the Liberian officials, whose visit to Freetown would probably be of an unofficial character.

5. The Counsellor was asked to request the State Department to treat the statement which had been made/

made to the Liberian Minister here as strictly confidential, lest German propagandists should make use there of it.

I am, with great truth and respect,

Sir,

Your Excellency's obedient Servant,

(For the Secretary of State)

V. *Carver* *Benjamin*