

China: Safety of Br. Nationals

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FORNIGN OFFICE, S.W.1.

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24th August, 1939.

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Sir,

1113/1

With reference to my despatch No.504 of the 30th May last, on the subject of Shanghai, I shall be glad if Your Excellency will now inform the United States Government that His Majesty's Government have had under consideration the action to be taken by the British military garrisons at Shanghai and Tientsin in the event of:-

- (a) A Japanese threat to the integrity of the International Settlement at Shanghai or of the British Concession at Tientsin arising from the present situation in China, and
- (b) War with Japan.

2. At the same time His Majesty's Government have been considering what measures might be taken, in either of the contingencies referred to above, to safeguard the interests of British civilian nationals in these two places.

3. You should state that the Brigadier at Tientsin was recently authorized to disclose, at his discretion, to the Commander of the United States military forces /there

His Excellency

The Right Honourable

Sir Ronald Lindsay, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.,

etc., etc., etc.,

Washington.

there, his instructions for the action of British troops at Tientsin should the Japanese invade the Concession, during the course of the present campaign, and His Majesty's Government consider it advisable that the United States Government should be made aware of the policy of His Majesty's Government in regard to the action of the British forces at Shanghai. These instructions are that, in the event of Japanese troops seeking to enter the British Concession at Tientsin, or the British sector of the International Settlement at Shanghai, opposition by His Majesty's military forces must not be carried to a point where armed conflict is likely to result; force however may always be employed for the protection of British lives. A copy of the relevant extract from the "Army Council's Instructions for the General Officer Commanding the British Troops in China" is enclosed for your information.

4. You should go on to invite the United States Government to reciprocate by communicating to us their instructions in the event of a Japanese occupation of the International Settlement at Shanghai in the absence of war and also any instructions given to their North China garrisons in the event of similar contingencies.

5. In the view of His Majesty's Government the numerical superiority of the Japanese forces in

China...

China precludes any possibility of effective resistance. Any show of force therefore can only be bluff. Whilst it is possible that it might act as a deterrent, there is a grave danger that, in their present temper, the Japanese military authorities in China might persist in their intentions, notwithstanding that to do so might be contrary to the policy of the Japanese Government. The risk of resisting a minor incident in order to avert a major one is, in their view, too great, the ensuing hostilities could but result in the British Garrison being overwhelmed. For the sake of prestige the British Government would then have little option but to make the matter a casus belli, thereby offering Germany and Italy an opportunity for aggression in Europe.

6. Apart from this danger, an armed clash with the Japanese could not fail to expose all foreign nationals to serious danger. In the course of the fighting the Japanese are unlikely to have any regard for the lives of civilians. Furthermore the fact that they have been opposed by force may well excite the Japanese troops to excesses, from which they might otherwise forbear, against the persons and property of foreign nationals.

7. As regards the position of British civilians

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in Shanghai and Tientsin. In the circumstances envisaged in paragraph 1 (a) above, His Majesty's Government consider that they would be no worse situated than those at Hankow, and that little personal danger is to be anticipated, providing no resistance by force is offered.

8. In the case of war with Japan you should inform the United States Government that it is the policy of His Majesty's Government to withdraw the British garrisons from North China and Shanghai if circumstances permit. If, however, this step cannot be taken, resistance in situ would not only be useless from the military point of view, but for the reasons given in paragraph 5 above, might also prove of great dis-service to British and other foreign civilian nationals. After careful examination of the possibilities there seems in such a case no alternative to the garrison submitting to internment.

9. His Majesty's Government would be glad to learn in confidence whether, in the event of Japan becoming engaged in war with Great Britain or France, the United States Government propose to retain their garrisons in China and if so what attitude they propose to adopt vis-a-vis Japan in the International Settlement at Shanghai.

10. With regard to the position of British

civilian...

civilian nationals at Shanghai and Tientsin in the event of war, the views of the Admiralty are at present awaited. Subject to these views, however, His Majesty's Government are inclined to accept the view expressed by His Majesty's Ambassador in China and His Majesty's Consul-General in Shanghai, that evacuation before or after the outbreak of hostilities would be impracticable, and consider that in this case also little personal danger to civilian nationals is to be anticipated.

11. You should make enquiries regarding the plans of the United States Government for the protection of their nationals in either of the two contingencies referred to, and ascertain whether, should war supervene, they would be willing to approach the Japanese Government with a view to suitable arrangements being made for the welfare of British civilian nationals in China. You should further enquire tentatively whether, should it be found necessary for the British garrisons in these two places to lay down their arms, the United States Government would be prepared to suggest to the Japanese Government the internment of British troops under United States auspices.

I am, with great truth and respect,

Sir,

Your Excellency's obedient Servant,

(For the Secretary of State)

What does this
in fact involve?