



AIDE-MÉMOIRE

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Referring to the British Embassy's aide-mémoire of August 29, on the subject of action to be taken by or in regard to landed armed forces at Shanghai and Tientsin in certain contingencies:

The Department of State wishes to thank the British Embassy and the British Foreign Office for the information given. The Department, having considered the inquiries made, replies as follows:

The American landed armed forces in China were landed and are maintained in that country for the purpose of protecting American lives and such incidental protection of American property as may be appropriate. They are emphatically not intended to engage in combat operations against authorized armed forces of any nation. Our concept, especially during recent years, has been, and is, that, in the presence of emergency situations wherein it appears that the local authorities are not able or may not

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be able to maintain order and to afford appropriate protection to our nationals, we shall, and we do, at certain points land and maintain armed forces to supplement or to function in substitution for the efforts of the local authorities in those connections. We consider it the essential mission of our landed armed forces to safeguard the lives of American nationals, operating always under rules of reason and reasonableness. We do not expect them to move into outlying areas or to act as guards for persons or property stationed in and remaining in such areas. In moments of special danger, we request of our nationals who are in such areas that they withdraw therefrom and come to points at which we can with reasonableness endeavor to afford them protection. We expect of our landed armed forces assistance in the maintenance of communications, especially radio communications. We expect of them, in the event of developments which may call for evacuation of our nationals en masse from any given point, service in various capacities of armed escort. We expect of them the rendering of various miscellaneous services such as, for illustration,

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those which were rendered by them at Peiping in the autumn of 1937 and those which are being rendered by them currently in the presence of the situation produced by the floods at Tientsin. We expect them to operate in harmony with and in appropriate and practicable cooperation with the operations of the similarly landed armed forces of other countries whose objectives and problems are similar to ours.

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We have not failed to envisage the possibility of a move on the part of the Japanese Government or Japanese armed forces toward occupation of the International Settlement at Shanghai in the absence of war, or of possible similar acts at other points in China. In as much as it cannot be known in advance under what circumstances or in what manner such a move might in the future be made, it has been our feeling that to affirm in advance what we intend to do or not to do in the presence of such a contingency would be inadvisable. We expect of our diplomatic, consular, naval, and military authorities in China exercise of discretion within the framework of the principles which we have laid down, as stated above; we expect of them alert observation

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observation of impending developments; we expect of them anticipatory and prompt reporting; and we expect of ourselves such making of decisions and such issuing of instructions as in our best judgment may be called for in situations of special emergency when and as situations develop.

We share the view of the British Government that the small landed armed forces of the various occidental powers, in China, could not make any effective resistance to an effort on the part of the numerically superior Japanese armed forces in China to seize any point at which the said landed armed forces of the other powers are located; also, the further view of the British Government that such an effort, if made, would create the various hazards to which the British Government calls attention.

The British Government inquires in confidence whether, in the event of Japan becoming engaged in war with Great Britain or France, the Government of the United States intends to retain our garrisons in China, and, if so, what attitude we intend to adopt vis-à-vis Japan in the International Settlement at Shanghai. -- To this question, also, we find

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it impossible to give a categorical reply. Our action will have to be determined in the light of circumstances as the situation unfolds. We have stationed our landed armed forces in China when and as we have felt that circumstances called for their presence. We have stated publicly and repeatedly that we will remove those forces when and as we feel that their presence in China is no longer called for. The likelihood is that, in a contingency such as the British Government suggests, the need for presence of American landed armed forces for the protection of lives of American nationals would not be diminished. Our attitude vis-à-vis Japan in the International Settlement at Shanghai would have to be determined in the light of the attitude and acts of the Japanese and other governments and authorities. We would expect to continue our constant effort to afford appropriate and practicable protection to our nationals under rules of reason and reasonableness.

With regard to the position of American civilian nationals at Shanghai and Tientsin in the event of Japan becoming engaged in war with Great Britain or France, we

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consider it likely that we would suggest to our civilian nationals that they withdraw to places of less danger.

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We would expect to afford assistance as regards facilities for withdrawal. We would expect to continue to afford appropriate and practicable protection to those who decline or who find it impossible to withdraw. Our action, however, as the situation unfolded, would have to be guided by developments.

With regard to a question of making suitable arrangements, should war supervene, for the welfare of British civilian nationals in China, we would be willing to approach the Japanese Government and would wish to be of such assistance as might be appropriate and practicable.

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Should it be found necessary for the British garrisons at Shanghai and at Tientsin to lay down their arms, we would be prepared to suggest to the Japanese Government either an internment or a safe evacuation of such troops under United States' auspices.

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The Government of the United States of course hopes that none of the contingencies under reference will arise.

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It realizes that, if any of them do arise, new and difficult problems will confront all of the governments which have interests in China; and, having constantly in mind not only its own rights and obligations but the rights and obligations of the various countries individually and collectively concerned, it will endeavor to shape its general course and its particular acts with due regard to the rights, obligations and interests involved.

Department of State,

Washington,

September 4, 1939