

Far East. 264/27/40

~~Treaties: Commercial: U.S. and Japan~~

2

BRITISH EMBASSY,

WASHINGTON, D.C.,

January 17th, 1940.

No. 62.

My Lord,

With reference to my despatch

1549/5/39. No. 1312 of the 20th November, 1939, to
 1302/7/39 Sir Ronald Lindsay's despatch No. 831 of
 the 28th July, 1939, and to connected corres-
 pondence regarding the denunciation of the
 United States-Japanese Commercial Treaty, I
 have the honour to transmit herewith copies
 of a long letter which Mr. Henry L. Stimson,
 former United States Secretary of State,
 addressed on the 10th January to the "New York
 Times", proposing (i) a "moral embargo" on the
 export of iron ore, scrap iron and aviation
 spirit to Japan, and (ii) passage of legisla-
 tion, such as has already been introduced into
 Congress, to prohibit the export to Japan "of
 arms, munitions and the raw materials out of
 which arms are made". Such action, in
 Mr. Stimson's view, would redound both to the
 moral credit and to the material advantage of
 the United States.

169.

2. Commenting on Mr. Stimson's letter
 the "New York Times" accepted the moral argument
 but/

The Right Honourable

The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,

etc., etc., etc.,

CB:ACEM:HK

INDEX

but had doubts about the material interest. "Can we be certain", it asked, "that the imposition of an American embargo would not mean merely a diversion of Japanese war orders to other markets? Would an American embargo have the moral support of the other nations which are signatories with us to the Nine-Power Treaty for the preservation of the territorial integrity of China?" These questions brought the "New York Times" a quantity of letters some of which took the view that an action which was morally right should be taken regardless of the attitude of others or of the material advantage or disadvantage which it might bring. In a second editorial the "New York Times" cautiously rejoined that, all the same, "to impose a unilateral embargo on a nation with which we are at peace is a very grave step indeed. On moral as well as on practical grounds we have every reason to wish to be as certain as we possibly can be, before taking such a step, that its consequences will be beneficial".

3. Walter Lippmann, the columnist, writing on the same day, expressly accepted Mr. Stimson's moral judgment of the Japanese aggression and his "conception of the political responsibilities of the United States" but argued that this is not the proper time for

Congress/

Congress to exercise its right to impose an embargo. He quotes Mr. Stimson's view that "the very last thing which the Japanese Government desires is a war with the United States", and thinks it may be correct. "But", he continues, "the danger is not that Japan will declare war if Congress imposes an embargo; the danger is that Japan, relying upon the fact that the United States does not wish to go to war, is not really prepared to go to war, and, in view of the European situation, ought not to go to war, will be driven by resentment and necessity to commit new aggressions in the belief that it is safe to do so". The proper course, in Lippmann's view, is to devise ways and means to reduce the arms traffic "without defying Japanese opinion in such a way that any Japanese Government would have to make an equally spectacular reply", and concurrently to "explore by negotiation the problem of a general settlement in the Far East" while keeping Chinese resistance going with a loan to China until the end of the war in Europe.

4. I am sending copies of this despatch to His Majesty's Ambassadors at Tokyo and Shanghai and to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom at Ottawa.

I have the honour to be,
with the highest respect,
My Lord,
Your Lordship's most obedient,
humble servant,

(SGD) IOTHIAN