

Memorandum of a conversation between Hitler,
Ribbentrop and Ciano at Obersalzberg August 12, 1939.

At the beginning of the conversation, the Fuehrer with the aid of maps showed count Ciano the present position of Germany from a military point of view. Emphasized western fortifications. No French break-through possible because of special protection of sensitive points. German fortifications also along Belgian and Dutch borders. French violation of Belgian neutrality would, under pressure from Flemish element, range Belgium on German side. Dutch also would defend neutrality against French because of danger to lose colonies to Japanese. Also Netherlands were unsuitable territory to start a war. Germany was closer to river Meuse and could reach it first. Rhine gave additional protection near mouth.

Re English sea blockade: German bombers could attack blockading ships. "The Scandinavian countries would doubtless remain neutral and they were certain that neither side would attack them because the occupation of countries as large as Norway and Sweden hardly came into consideration (it was not a practical question)." Similarly Switzerland would defend its neutrality to utmost.

In the East Germany had also erected strong defenses. Showed Ciano various defense system of East Prussia. Impregnable defense lines opposite Berlin. Berlin being only 150 km from Polish frontier, there was danger of air attacks, especially since attacks from high altitude would permit hitting such large target as Berlin.

"Turning to the military position of the Western Powers the Fuehrer pointed again to the vulnerability of England from the air. British aircraft production had made progress, but protective measures against raids were still much in arrears. It was known that England had decided only in the previous autumn upon the definite type of anti-aircraft gun. The German experience of their own seven years of rearmament assured them that large scale production was possible only some long time after the selection of the proto-type, so that no real aircraft protection could come into existence in England for one or two years. Furthermore, London and all the large British centres of industry and cities suffered from the same disadvantage as Berlin in relation to air attack; bombing can be carried out from a great height and out of range of English anti-aircraft guns with the complete certainty that the results would always be successful."

At sea, England had for the moment no immediate reinforcements in prospect. Some time would elapse before any of the ships now under construction could be taken into service. As far as the land army was concerned, after the introduction of conscription 60,000 men had been called to the colours. If England kept the necessary troops in her own country she could send to France at the most two infantry divisions and one armored division. For the rest she could supply a few bomber squadrons but hardly any fighters, since at the outbreak of the war the German Air Force would at once attack England, and English fighters would be urgently needed for the defence of their own country. With regard to the position of France, the Fuehrer said that in the event of a general war, after the destruction of Poland (which would not take long) Germany would be in a position to assemble hundreds of divisions along the West wall and France would then be compelled to concentrate all her available forces from the Colonies, from the Italian frontier and elsewhere on her own Maginot Line for the life and death struggle which would then ensue. The Fuehrer also thought that the French would find it no easier to overrun the Italian fortifications than to overrun the West Wall. Here Count Ciano showed some signs of extreme doubt."

Discusses Polish military and national (racial) weakness. Only assistance of Poland by Western Powers over a longer period would give her the needed weapons. "In these circumstances Poland could be struck to the ground by Germany in the shortest time."

"Since the Poles through their whole attitude had made it clear that in any case in the event of a conflict they would stand on the side of the enemies of Germany and Italy, a quick liquidation at the present moment could only be of advantage for the unavoidable conflict with the Western Democracies. If a hostile Poland remained on Germany's Eastern frontier, not only would the eleven Eastern Prussian divisions be tied down, but also further contingents would be kept in Pomerania and Silesia. This would not be necessary in the event of a previous liquidation. Generally speaking, the best to happen would be for the neutrals to be liquidated one after the other. This process could be carried out more easily if on every occasion one partner of the Axis covered the other, while it was dealing with an uncertain neutral. Italy might well regard Yugoslavia as a neutral of this kind. The Fuehrer had told the Prince Regent on his visit to Germany that, with special relation to Italy,

he should make a gesture showing that he sided politically with the Axis and thought of a closer connection with the Axis and of the withdrawal of Yugoslavia from the League of Nations. Prince Paul agreed with the latter proposal." Had later been to London to reinsure himself with Western Powers. Same line as Gafencu. Of Balkan countries, Axis could trust only Bulgaria. Rumania was afraid of Hungary. Hungary was friendly and Slovakia under German influence.

Coming back to the Danzig question: impossible to back down. Agreement with Italy on Tirol should not be taken as precedent for other areas. German withdrawal in South justified by pointing to a general easterly and north easterly direction of German policy. "The east and north-east, that is to say the Baltic countries had been Germany's undisputed sphere of influence since time immemorial, as the Mediterranean had been an appropriate sphere for Italy. For economic reasons also Germany needed the foodstuffs and the timber from these eastern regions."

Count Ciano expressed great surprise over the completely unexpected seriousness of the position. In previous conversations no sign of this. Danzig was expected to be settled, according to Ribbentrop. "On these grounds, the Duce in view of his conviction that a conflict with the Western Powers was unavoidable had assumed that he should make his preparations for this event; he had made plans for a period of two or three years. If immediate conflict was unavoidable, the Duce as he had told Ciano, would certainly stand on the German side but for various reasons he would welcome the postponement of the conflict until a later time." Ciano then showed Italy's military position with aid of map. "Italy believed that a conflict with Poland would not be limited to that country but would develop into a general European war."

"The Fuehrer commented that on this point there were differences of opinion. He personally was absolutely certain that the Western Democracies in the last resort would shrink from entering into a general war."

"Count Ciano replied he wished the Fuehrer were right, but that he did not think so, in any case it was necessary to consider the most unfavorable case, that is to say general war." Points out weaknesses of Italy because of exhaustion through war against Abyssinia and

civil war in Spain. Had to wait for additional ships to be built. Colonies still vulnerable. Fortifications against Tunis not completed.

Abyssinia could not be held as yet.

Italian plans for autarchy not yet advanced to point where she could wage a longer war without difficulties. Repatriation of Italians from France not completed.

Duce was anxious to hold Rome exhibition in 1942.

Factors of political nature favor postponement in Duce's opinion. Western Powers could not be expected to stay united because of fundamental lack of unity. Union sacree in France to break up in party quarrels if time would elapse. At present Duce thought Axis itself was responsible for unity in Western Democracies.

Duce also thought Japan would be stronger after two years because war against China would be concluded. "The position of Roosevelt in America would be severely shaken after a period of external tranquillity, so that he would not be elected to the presidency for a third time, whereas his election was certain if war broke out." Spain also needed time for rest, but in 2 or 3 years would be a considerable factor on side of Axis, because she proposed to build 4 battleships of 35,000 tons each within 2 years.

"For these reasons the Duce insisted that the Axis Powers should make a gesture which would reassure people of the peaceful intentions of Italy and Germany. This could be done through the publication of a communique which Ciano had already given to Ribbentrop (follows text of the proposed communique (NOT IN TEXT SEEN). Ciano said the Duce had in mind a proposal for an international conference. The Fuehrer declared that if a conference were held, Russia could no longer be excluded from future meetings of the Powers. In the German-Russian conversations, the Russians had made it clear with reference to Munich and other occasions when they were excluded, that in future they would not submit to such treatment." Duce was in favor of peaceful gesture and had turned down Fuehrer's proposal "saying that the Western Powers were not really ready for war. These Powers, however, according to the conviction of the Duce, who obtained very valuable information from the Democracies, would certainly begin war at the present time if they were in any way driven into a corner by the Axis and saw no other way out." A peaceful gesture would offer a way out. Poland would be isolated after some time and be ready to accept reasonable solution.

"The Fuehrer answered that for a solution of the Polish problem no time should be lost; the longer one waited until autumn, the more difficult would military operations become in Eastern Europe." Discusses danger from mud after September.

"Ciano asked how soon, according to the Fuehrer's view, the Danzig question must be settled. The Fuehrer answered that this settlement must be made one way or another by the end of August." Hitler then indicated that he expected the Polish situation to end with a German ultimatum.

"During this exchange of conversation the Fuehrer was given a telegram from Moscow and a telegram from Tokio. The conversation was interrupted for a short time and Ciano was then told the text of the Moscow telegram. The Russians agreed to the despatch of a German political negotiator to Moscow. Ribbentrop added that the Russians were fully informed of the intentions of Germany with regard to Poland. He himself at the Fuehrer's orders had informed the Russian Charge d'Affaires. The Fuehrer added that according to his opinion Russia would not be ready to take the chestnuts out of the fire for the Western Powers. Stalin's position would be endangered as much by a victorious as by a defeated Russian army. Russian interest was to extend her access to the Balkans. Germany had nothing against this. On the other hand, Russia would never interfere on behalf of Poland whom she hated whole-heartedly. The sending of the Anglo-French Military Mission to Moscow had only one purpose, i.e. to conceal the catastrophic position of the political negotiations."

Fuehrer said he would consider communique proposal. To be continued next day.