

Memorandum by Ribbentrop on the attitude of England,  
June 1938

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England.

Since England was caught napping by the Italian-Abyssinian war, the question of England's preparedness for war has over-ruled all political matters. Three years of armament propaganda in conjunction with events in Spain, China and central Europe have sufficed to change a predominantly pacifist people into one wholly prepared for war.

In 1936 the three "have-nots" were given fairly equal consideration as possible enemies. In 1938 the Japanese threat is considered postponed for years or even decades because of Japanese commitment in China. Italy is considered to be in need of peace. Germany only serious enemy left, mainly by Luftwaffe.

As England has only to lose, war could be fought only if considered unavoidable by both Govt. and people. The attempt at a genuine compromise with Germany (something on the lines of: German leadership (not conquest!) of southeast Europe, frontier revision by plebiscite, West African colonies; 4-power pact; limitation of armament). Halifax believes personal future of Chamberlain administration to be bound up with success of a genuine compromise with Rome and Berlin (and with the expulsion of Soviet influence in Europe; hence the otherwise incomprehensible attitude to the Spanish bombardment question; Chamberlain wishes Franco to win, and quickly!)

However the belief in the possibility of an understanding between England and Germany is rapidly disappearing. Behind the NS programme for Germany (which has been widely accepted) a new Imperialism is suspected.

Here the Czech question assumes the importance of a decisive test-case.

"The Govt. and public opinion in England are quite convinced that the Czech National State within its present Czechoslovak boundaries is out of date. Outward neutrality (renunciation of Soviet friendship!) and internal self-determination are considered to be necessary and the severing of frontier territories by popular plebiscite to be possible, should the Czechs continue to be obstructive (the fact that a dirty trick - text

doubtful - was played by the Czechs in May has by now been realized in London). A new world war is only believed to be avoidable if Germany is prepared to consider the possibility of a gradual solution of the Czech problem."

"A German attempt to solve the problem of Bohemia and Moravia by a military coup, would under present circumstances, mean an immediate declaration of war by England (and according to English opinion also by France). In such a war the British Government would have the whole British people behind it. It would be waged as a "crusade to free Europe from German militarism." In London it is confidently believed that, with American help (which is expected to be operating fully, not in a matter of months, but of days and weeks) it would be won - but at the price of an inestimable expansion of Bolshevism in the non-Anglo-Saxon world."

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