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Answer to a memorandum by Count Brockdorff-Rantzau to the Reich Chancellor

by

General von Seeckt

Sept. 11, 1922.

Germany must conduct an active policy. Every state must do this. At the moment when it abandons an active policy, it is no longer a state. A goal and a will are part of an active policy. For the carrying out of this policy a correct estimation of one's own strength is required, as well as an understanding of the methods and aims of the other powers.

Any one who makes his own powerlessness the basis of his political thought, who sees only dangers, who only wants to submit quietly is not conducting a policy and should be kept far from the scene of activities.

The year 1814-1815 found France in a state of complete military and political collapse, and no one carried on a more active policy at the Congress of Vienna than Talleyrand, to the benefit of France. Has the world ever seen a greater catastrophe than that of Russia in the last war? and how actively did the Soviet government arise, both externally and internally! Did not the "Sick Man" appear, like Lazarus, dead for ever and buried by the Sèvres Treaty? - and today Turkey is confronting England after overcoming Greece. She is conducting an active Turkish policy.

Has not finally the first stirring of German political activity, the Rapallo Treaty, clearly resulted in raising Germany's prestige? The attitude towards this tour de force is dividing men's minds in their judgment of the Russian problem. The treaty is primarily significant, not for its economic evaluation, although this is <sup>not</sup> to be considered <sup>(as minor)</sup> of ~~as much~~ importance, but for its political success. A combination of Germany with Russia is the

first and up to now almost the only increase in power which we have attained since the signing of the peace. That the beginning of this development lay in the realm of economics is natural in view of the entire situation; but its strength lies in the fact that this economic rapprochement prepares for the possibility of a political and, through this, of a military alliance. There is no doubt that an increase in power is implicit in this double combination for Germany - and also for Russia. However, there are German politicians who are afraid of this increase in power. They see in the political, military, and economic strengthening of Germany and in an active German policy the danger of renewed and more stringent countermeasures on the part of the western enemy. In this connection they put the question of east- or west-orientation, which they prefer to avoid answering. But this question actually does not come up at all. It is a good idea, with reference to this, to avoid misleading comparisons with Bismarck's policy and to deduce from it for our benefit only the fundamental axiom, that we must conduct a German policy at all times, i.e. to investigate how, in view of the fact that every nation has an egoistic policy, one can utilize these interests of others for one's own advantage for tomorrow and the future. We shall have to see how the interests of the western powers compare with ours. One should be clear about France. She is conducting a policy of destruction pur et simple, and must conduct it according to indestructible and inflexible principles. The chance that economic influences might lead French policy into a different path is equal to zero, even leaving out of consideration the fact that it is questionable whether an economic development of Germany lies at all within the interests of the influential French industries. The opposite seems to be the case, and France's economic aims coincide with her political ones in working to bring about the destruction of Germany. The consideration that the already insolvent debtor will become even less able to pay changes nothing in this. France is no longer

counting on payment and does not even desire it, because it would derange her political plans; no Lubersac-Stinnes agreement has the slightest effect on this; this agreement aims at profiting from the masses as much as possible before bankruptcy is declared officially. The whole policy of appeasement and conciliation towards France is sure to fail, insofar as political success is intended. The question of west orientation, as far as France is concerned, is not to be considered. It is of no importance to the French policy whether we ally ourselves with Russia or not, in either case the complete and as yet unfinished destruction of Germany remains her goal; only this aim will be more difficult to fulfill towards a Germany supported by Russia.

England is drifting towards a new historical conflict with France, even if she is not facing the possibility of war in the immediate future; this is lurking in the background. A glance at the Orient is sufficient, perhaps even for him who neither wanted to see nor hear at Genoa. English interests in the Dardanelles, in Egypt, and in India are certainly infinitely more important at the moment than those on the Rhine, and an agreement between France and England at Germany's expense, in other words, a yielding on the part of England for a momentary advantage, does not lie at all outside the realm of possibility. And still this agreement will only be temporary. The moment is coming and must come when England will look for her continental ally. At that time she will prefer the mercenary in the process of recovery and will herself help to strengthen him. An eventual rapprochement between Germany and Russia does not play a decisive rôle, either for England's attitude if she gives in to France, or in the search for an ally. England's policy will be guided by other forceful motives than the fear of an improbable attack from a Russia strengthened by German aid. In later times a German politician may again have to face the choice between east and west, Russia or England. The question now is the choice between England and France; it will not be difficult for Germany; it is a foregone conclusion because of the attitude of France

outlined above. Every day brings proof that England is interested in an economically strong Germany. The danger of German competition in world trade is a possibility with which a future England will have to cope. ~~That~~ economic reconstruction is unthinkable without political and military strengthening seems to be clearer to the English than to many a German politician. When the break between England and France comes, then England will be all the more interested in a military strengthening of France's neighbor and will have to take it in her stride if Germany obtains some of her strength from the east. However, Germany's attitude towards Russia can not, shall not, and ~~will~~<sup>must</sup> not be influenced by consideration of England. As far as America is concerned, an alliance between Russia and Germany will hardly influence her against us. She is interested, even if not to a decisive degree, in the economic reconstruction of Germany, and anything else is ~~inimical to~~<sup>inimical to</sup> ~~her interests~~ Russia.

We must now turn our attention to the east and southeast. Many people may not notice the increasing friendliness between Yugoslavia and Russia; but it is one of the decisive factors in Balkan policy. Externally, Czechoslovakia is completely dependent on France, but is trying to get rid of this association by other alliances. She sees herself placed in an unfavorable position by France; antagonism towards either Russia or Germany does not coincide with Czech interests. Czechoslovakia may hope, in the event of a war between Germany and Poland, to obtain concessions in Silesia, but in view of the strong economic ties which link her with Germany, this hope does not enter the question. In Russia, Czechoslovakia must create a market for her surfeited industry. Russia was Bohemia's hope, as long as it was still part of the Habsburg Empire. The Czech regiments deserted to the Russians; even now they can not be used against Russia. A rapprochement between Russia and Germany does not represent a threat for Czechoslovakia; rather, it increases the desire to live in peace with a strengthened Germany. Czechoslovakia, in spite of external rapprochement, stands in opposition to Poland.

With Poland we reach the crux of the eastern problem. Poland's existence is unbearable and incompatible with the conditions prerequisite for Germany's life. She must disappear and will disappear through her own internal weakness and through Russia - with our help. Poland is even more unbearable for Russia than for us; no Russia can agree to a Poland. With Poland there will fall one of the strongest pillars of the Versailles Treaty, the predominance of France. To attain this goal must be one of the fundamental aims of German policy, because it is possible of fulfillment. Attainable only through Russia or with her help. Poland can never be of advantage to Germany, either economically, for she is incapable of development, or politically, for she is a vassal of France. The re-establishment of the former frontiers between Russia and Germany is the prerequisite for the further development of both. Russia and Germany at the boundaries of 1914! should be the basis for an alliance between both. This attitude on the part of Germany towards Poland need not be a secret fearfully kept. A clarification of it towards Russia can only inspire confidence. Poland's Germanophobia can not be increased. The threat from two sides will in the long run undermine Poland's strength more and more. Above all, it would be of inestimable advantage for Germany if Poland were assured that if she took part, with France, in a war of sanctions against Germany, she would have Russia on her neck. The mere impression that the Rapallo Treaty might have military consequences sufficed to influence Polish policy favorably, just as its effects reached also the eastern border states and Finland. These questions should not be overlooked in considering the strengthening of Russia by our help and by an active German policy.

Of course any one who sees in an agreement with Russia only the danger of laying ourselves open to England, and who does not understand that Russia needs us, who defines all active policy by the slogan, "military experiment", can not be expected to arrive at a correct estimation of the situation and much less to utilize it successfully. Any one who is suffering from

"hatred of uniforms" and who has not yet grasped the fact that in the last analysis any political and economic activity rests on power, will not advocate an active policy. But any one who sees in the Rapallo Treaty a political faux pas may be effective in another position; as German representative in Moscow he appears impossible.

It is a tried, but still not a good, weapon in political life to exaggerate the opponent's intentions willfully and to attack this exaggeration. For who has concluded a written military treaty which binds us ~~unilaterally~~ unilaterally, or who is intending to do so now? Certainly not the responsible military authorities. Then where do we lay ourselves open to attack? The fact that the Rapallo Treaty has brought us under suspicion of having obtained this increase in power without committing ourselves is the chief advantage of this agreement, which can not be underestimated. What, then, is our goal? ~~What~~ do we want from, in, and with Russia? Of what does the terrifying east orientation consist? We want two things: First, a strengthening of Russia in the economic and political, that is to say in the military, sphere, and indirectly through this our own strengthening by reinforcing a possible future ally; furthermore, we desire, for the present cautiously and tentatively, an increase in our own power directly by helping to construct in Russia an armament industry which would be of service to us in case of war. Of course this armament industry serves directly to fulfill our first aim. It is being developed by private German firms which follow our instructions. The extent of this construction depends on the development of the situation in Russia and on the willingness and efficiency of Germany's private industry. We can fulfill X Russia' demands for further aid in the military and technical field as long as it appears advantageous, both in the way of materiel and of personnel. In other military spheres we can, if Russia wishes, put out feelers and begin negotiations; bilateral military representatives are desirable for this pur-

pose. Details can not be discussed here and in any case are to be left for the future. The goal of direct preparation of armaments is to be attained, as before, by private industry. In all these measures, many of which are only being taken in hand now, the participation and even the official knowledge of the German government are completely out of the question. The particulars of the negotiations can be settled only by decisions of the military authorities. It should be self-understood that the latter will conclude no agreements binding the Reich without notifying the leading political authorities. As long as the German government is not negotiating officially, the German embassy in Moscow is not the best place for discussions. Its rôle is merely not to work against the aims described above and to agree internally with the policy once we have entered upon it. Any one who is still living in the days of Versailles and maintains that Germany has abandoned for ever all "imperialistic and militaristic" aims, that is to say, stripped of demagogic phraseology, any active policy, that man is not fit to represent Germany interests in Moscow. Perhaps not anywhere.

Let me touch upon a few objections to the proposed German policy towards Russia. It is certain that Germany today is in no position to offer France any resistance. Our policy is to prepare for this eventuality. An invasion of Germany by France to assist Poland is a military possibility as long as Germany does not co-operate voluntarily. This thought originates in the ideas of our diplomats of 1919; three years of work have passed since then. The war between France and Russia on the Rhine is a political bogey. Germany will not turn bolshevist, not even through an agreement with Russia on external questions.

It is said that the German people, in its socialist majority, is opposed to an active policy, which must take into account the possibility of war. One must admit that the spirit which infused the Versailles peace delegation has not yet disappeared and that the foolish slogan, "no more war!"

is still echoing far and wide, especially in pacifist bourgeois circles, but there are many in the working classes, even in the official Social Democratic party, who are not willing to kowtow to France and Poland. There is certainly a far-reaching and understandable craving for peace among the German people. The pros and cons of war shall be most clearly weighed in military heads; but to conduct a policy, one must lead. The German people will follow the leader in spite of everything in the fight for its existence. Our task is to prepare for this struggle, for it shall not be spared us. In case of warlike complications - and they appear tangible and close even today - ~~that~~ then it will not be the duty of our leading statesmen to keep Germany out of the conflict - that would be futile or suicidal - but to support the right side as strongly as possible.