

Washington, August 10, 1920.

Excellency:

The agreeable intimation, which you have conveyed to the State Department that the Italian Government would welcome a statement of the views of this Government on the situation presented by the Russian advance into Poland, deserves a prompt response, and I will attempt without delay, a definition of this Government's position not only as to the situation arising from Russian military pressure upon Poland, but also as to certain cognate and inseparable phases of the Russian question viewed more broadly.

This Government believes in a united, free and autonomous Polish State and the people of the United States are earnestly solicitous for the maintenance of Poland's political independence and territorial integrity. From this attitude we will not depart, and the policy of this Government will be directed to the employment of all available means to render it effectual. The Government therefore takes no exception to the effort apparently being made in some quarters to arrange an armistice between Poland and Russia, but it would not, at least for the present, participate in any plan for the expansion of the armistice negotiations into a general European conference which would in all probability involve two results, from both of which this country strongly recoils, viz, the recognition of the Bolshevik regime and a settlement of Russian problems almost inevitably upon the basis of a dismemberment of Russia.

From the beginning of the Russian Revolution, in March, 1917, to the present moment, the Government and the people of the United States have followed its development with friendly solicitude and with profound sympathy for the efforts of the Russian people to reconstruct their national life upon the broad basis of popular self-government. The Government of the United States, reflecting the spirit of its people, has at all times desired to help the Russian people. In that spirit all its relations with Russia, and with other nations in matters affecting the latter's interests, have been conceived and governed.

The Government of the United States was the first government to acknowledge the validity of the Revolution and to give recognition to the Provisional Government of Russia. Almost immediately thereafter it became necessary for the United States to enter the war against Germany and in that undertaking to become closely associated with the Allied Nations, including, of course, Russia. The war weariness of the masses of the Russian people was fully known to this Government and sympathetically comprehended. Prudence, self-interest and loyalty to our associates made it desirable that we should give moral and material support to the Provisional Government, which was struggling to accomplish a two-fold task, to carry on the war with vigor and, at the same time, to reorganize the life of the nation and establish a stable government based on popular sovereignty.

Quite independent of these motives, however, was the sincere friendship of the Government and the people of the United States for the great Russian nation. The friendship manifested by Russia toward this nation in a time of trial and distress has left us with an imperishable sense of gratitude. It was as a grateful friend that we sent to Russia an expert commission to aid in bringing about such a reorganization of the railroad transportation system of the country as would reinvigorate the whole of its economic life and so add to the well-being of the Russian people.

While deeply regretting the withdrawal of Russia from the war at a critical time, and the disastrous surrender at Brest-Litovsk, the United States has fully understood that the people of Russia were in no wise responsible.

The United States maintains unimpaired its faith in the Russian people, in their high character and their future. That they will overcome the existing anarchy, suffering and destitution we do not entertain the slightest doubt. The distressing character of Russia's transition has many historical parallels, and the United States is confident that restored, free and united Russia will again take a leading place in the world, joining with the other free nations in upholding peace and orderly justice.

Until that time shall arrive the United States feels that friendship and honor require that Russia's interests must be generously protected, and that, as far as possible, all decisions of vital importance to it, and especially those concerning its sovereignty over the territory of the former Russian Empire, be held in abeyance. By this feeling of friendship and honorable obligation to the great nation whose brave and heroic self-sacrifice contributed so much to the successful termination of the war, the Government of the United States was guided in its reply to the Lithuanian National Council, on October 15, 1919,¹⁴ and in its persistent refusal to recognize the Baltic States as separate nations independent of Russia. The same spirit was manifested in the note of this Government, of March 24, 1920, in which it was stated, with reference to certain proposed settlements in the Near East, that "no final decision should or can be made without the consent of Russia."

In line with these important declarations of policy, the United States withheld its approval from the decision of the Supreme Council at Paris recognizing the independence of the so called republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan, and so instructed its representative in Southern Russia, Rear-Admiral Newton A. McCully. Finally, while gladly giving recognition to the independence of Armenia, the Government of the United States has taken the position that the final determination of its boundaries must not be made without Russia's cooperation and agreement. Not only is Russia concerned because a considerable part of the territory of the new State of Armenia, when it shall be defined, formerly belonged to the Russian Empire: equally important is the fact that Armenia must have the good will and the protective friendship of Russia if it is to remain independent and free.

These illustrations show with what consistency the Government of the United States has been guided in its foreign policy by a loyal friendship for Russia. We are unwilling that while it is helpless in the grip of a non-representative government, whose only sanction is brutal force, Russia shall be weakened still further by a policy of dismemberment, conceived in other than Russian interests.

With the desire of the Allied Powers to bring about a peaceful solution of the existing difficulties in Europe, this Government is of course in hearty accord, and will support any justifiable steps to that end. It is unable to perceive, however, that a recognition of the Soviet regime would promote, much less accomplish this object, and it is therefore averse to any dealings with the Soviet regime beyond the most narrow boundaries to which a discussion of an armistice can be confined.

That the present rulers of Russia do not rule by the will or the consent of any considerable proportion of the Russian people is an incontestable fact. Although nearly two and a half years have passed since they seized the machinery of

government, promising to protect the Constituent Assembly against alleged conspiracies against it, they have not yet permitted anything in the nature of a popular election. At the moment when the work of creating a popular representative government based upon universal suffrage was nearing completion the Bolsheviki, although, in number, an inconsiderable minority of the people, by force and cunning seized the powers and machinery of government and have continued to use them with savage oppression to maintain themselves in power.

Without any desire to interfere in the internal affairs of the Russian people, or to suggest what kind of government they should have, the Government of the United States does express the hope that they will soon find a way to set up a government representing their free will and purpose. When that time comes, the United States will consider the measures of practical assistance which can be taken to promote the restoration of Russia, provided Russia has not taken itself wholly out of the pale of the friendly interest of other nations, by the pillage and oppression of the Poles.

It is not possible for the Government of the United States to recognize the present rulers of Russia as a government with which the relations common to friendly governments can be maintained. This conviction has nothing to do with any particular political or social structure which the Russian people themselves may see fit to embrace. It rests upon a wholly different set of facts. These facts, which none dispute, have convinced the Government of the United States, against its will, that the existing regime in Russia is based upon the negation of every principle of honor and good faith, and every usage and convention, underlying the whole structure of international law; the negation, in short, of every principle upon which it is possible to base harmonious and trustful relations, whether of nations or of individuals. The responsible leaders of the regime have frequently and openly boasted that they are willing to sign agreements and undertakings with foreign Powers while not having the slightest intention of observing such undertakings or carrying out such agreements. This attitude of disregard of obligations voluntarily entered into, they base upon the theory that no compact or agreement made with a non-Bolshevist government can have any moral force for them. They have not only avowed this as a doctrine, but have exemplified it in practice. Indeed, upon numerous occasions the responsible spokesmen of this Power, and its official agencies, have declared that it is their understanding that the very existence of Bolshevism in Russia, the maintenance of their own rule, depends, and must continue to depend, upon the occurrence of revolutions in all other great civilized nations, including the United States, which will overthrow and destroy their governments and set up Bolshevist rule in their stead. They have made it quite plain that they intend to use every means, including, of course, diplomatic agencies, to promote such revolutionary movements in other countries.

It is true that they have in various ways expressed their willingness to give "assurances" and "guarantees" that they will not abuse the privileges and immunities of diplomatic agencies by using them for this purpose. In view of their own declarations, already referred to, such assurances and guarantees cannot be very seriously regarded. Moreover, it is within the knowledge of the Government of the United States that the Bolshevist Government is itself subject to the control of a political faction, with extensive international ramifications through the Third Internationale, and that this body, which is heavily subsidized by the Bolshevist Government from the public revenues of Russia, has for its openly avowed aim the promotion of Bolshevist revolutions throughout the world. The leaders of the Bolsheviki have boasted that their promises of non-interference with other nations

would in no wise bind the agents of this body. There is no room for reasonable doubt that such agents would receive the support and protection of any diplomatic agencies the Bolsheviks might have in other countries. Inevitably, therefore, the diplomatic service of the Bolshevik Government would become a channel for intrigues and the propaganda of revolt against the institutions and laws of countries, with which it was at peace, which would be an abuse of friendship to which enlightened governments cannot subject themselves.

In the view of this Government, there cannot be any common ground upon which it can stand with a Power whose conceptions of international relations are so entirely alien to its own, so utterly repugnant to its moral sense. There can be no mutual confidence or trust, no respect even, if pledges are to be given and agreements made with a cynical repudiation of their obligations already in the mind of one of the parties. We cannot recognize, hold official relations with, or give friendly reception to the agents of a government which is determined and bound to conspire against our institutions; whose diplomats will be the agitators of dangerous revolt; spokesmen say that they sign agreements with no intention of keeping them.

To summarize the position of this Government, I would say, therefore, in response to your Excellency's inquiry, that it would regard with satisfaction a declaration by the Allied and Associated Powers, that the territorial integrity and true boundaries of Russia shall be respected. These boundaries should properly include the whole of the former Russian Empire, with the exception of Finland proper, ethnic Poland, and such territory as may by agreement form a part of the Armenian State. The aspirations of these nations for independence are legitimate. Each was forcibly annexed and their liberation from oppressive alien rule involves no aggressions against Russia's territorial rights, and has received the sanction of the public opinion of all free peoples. Such a declaration presupposes the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territory embraced by these boundaries, and in the opinion of this Government should be accompanied by the announcement that no transgression by Poland, Finland or any other Power, of the line so drawn and proclaimed will be permitted.

Thus only can the Bolshevik regime be deprived of its false, but effective, appeal to Russian nationalism and compelled to meet the inevitable challenge of reason and self-respect which the Russian people, secure from invasion and territorial violation, are sure to address to a social philosophy that degrades them and a tyranny that oppresses them.

The policy herein outlined will command the support of this Government.

Accept [etc.]
Bainbridge Colby