

Hitler's Letter to Colonel Walther von Reichenau on Germany's Situation with Respect to Foreign Relations (December 4, 1932)

Abstract

Hitler's National Socialist worldview determined his foreign policy goals, which focused above all on an aggressive expansion to the East and the opening up of "living space" [*Lebensraum*] in Eastern Europe. Consequently, he regarded the revision of the Versailles Treaty, which the governments of the Weimar Republic had already pursued, as an important step but hardly the final goal. On account of Germany's military weakness, however, Hitler was initially willing to pursue his foreign policy through diplomatic channels. The following letter to Colonel Walther von Reichenau (1884–1942) provides insight into Hitler's ideological-geopolitical assessment of the German situation only a few weeks before his appointment as Reich Chancellor.

Source

[...] The question of the territorial security of East Prussia is intimately connected to the whole foreign and domestic position of the Reich. I would like to sketch this briefly as follows:

The World War ended in such a way that France was unable to achieve all her aims. In particular, her hopes of a general internal collapse of the Reich were not realized. The peace treaty of Versailles was thus dictated by France's attempt to maintain as broad as possible a community of interest of states hostile to Germany. This aim was to be secured in the first place through the territorial truncation of the Reich. By handing over German territory to almost all of the surrounding states, it was hoped to forge a ring of nations bound together by common interests. In the East, Russia, which at the time was of no consequence (and whose development furthermore was unpredictable) was to be replaced by Poland, which was dependent on France. The fact that East Prussia was separated off by the Polish corridor inevitably led to the strong desire to incorporate this province into Poland, which in any case surrounded most of it. And, in fact, the propaganda for a greater Poland began to press for this immediately after the signing of the Versailles treaty.

Presumably out of fear of the danger which was clearly looming, German foreign policy endeavored to relieve the pressure in the East by establishing a close relationship with Russia. While appreciating the political and military reasons for this approach, I have always considered it dubious and opposed it. The reasons for my attitude, of which General von Hammerstein, in particular, has been aware for many years, were and still are as follows:

1. Russia is not a state but an ideology which at the moment is restricted to this territory, or rather dominates it, but which maintains sections in all other countries which not only pursue the same revolutionary goal but are also organizationally subordinate to the Moscow headquarters. A victory for these ideas in Germany must have incalculable consequences. However, the more one cooperates with the headquarters of this poisonous agency for diplomatic reasons, the more difficult it becomes to struggle against these poisonous tendencies. The German people are no more immune against Communism now than they were immune to the ideas of revolution in 1917 and 1918. Officers and statesmen can only assess this problem if they understand national psychologies. Experience shows that this is rarely the case.

2. For this reason I regard Soviet diplomacy not only as unreliable but as not comparable with the diplomatic leadership of other nations and, therefore, as ineligible to undertake negotiations and sign treaties. 'Treaties' can only be signed with combatants who are on the same ideological plane.

3. However, were we—which God forbid—to be saved by Soviet aid on some occasion, this would clearly imply the planting of the red flag in Germany.

4. In so far as the growth in Russia's military strength reduces the value to France of her Polish ally to the extent that French intentions towards Germany in the East are seriously jeopardized, France will either endeavor to draw Russia away from Poland or, in the event of the failure of such an action, drop Poland and replace her with Russia.

5. Germany's political cooperation with Russia produces an adverse response from the rest of the world. Economic cooperation will destroy our German export industry in the future.

It is for these reasons that for the past twelve years or so I have consistently proposed a closer relationship with Italy on the one hand and England on the other as the most desirable diplomatic goal.

[...]

Following the noticeable reduction in the value of her Polish ally, France has endeavored—and in my view successfully—to involve Russia in the Far East in order to relieve pressure on the Polish border. This far-reaching French action may be regarded as in essence successfully accomplished in the non-aggression pact between Russia and Poland which has now been signed. [...]

The moment that a particular domestic political situation creates an international atmosphere hostile to Germany, Poland will seize the opportunity to attack, and East Prussia will be lost. The declaration of a monarchy, for example, or any plan to restore the House of Hohenzollern—in whatever form—may immediately provoke this response.

The military means and possibilities open to East Prussia are, in my view, inadequate for a lengthy resistance with any prospect of success. Moreover, on the basis of the present political situation there will in my view be no military support from the Reich. I consider the impression of a speeding-up of German rearmament as the most serious danger. It is conceivable that France is no longer in a position to sabotage the granting of a theoretical equality of rights to Germany. In this case the succeeding period will be the most dangerous epoch in German history because the practical, technical, and organizational rearmament will have to follow on from the granting of theoretical equality. If ever there were a reason for a preventive war, then it would be in this case for an attack by France on Germany. Such a military act alone would create the new facts which are desired and the same world, which today bestows its theoretical benevolence upon us, would be wary of trying to correct the *fait accompli* by force of arms.

France cannot wish for anything better than to leave the first step in this new measure to a third party. It can devise reasons and pretexts for it at any time.

Thus, as I have already emphasized, I consider the threat of this attack to be acute and believe that it would be advisable to reckon with its onset at any moment!

However, at present there is no possibility of Germany intervening in such a conflict. The reason for this does not lie in the lack of the necessary armaments but much more in the total unsuitability of the German people for such a task thanks to its intellectual, moral, and political decline.

The German nation at the present time consists of two ideological camps of which one must be excluded from any military service for the present state. According to the last Reichstag elections [6.11.1932], the

ideological breakdown of our people is as follows:

Communists	6 million
Social Democrats	7.4 million
Centre	4 million
State Party etc.	1 million
National Socialists	12 million
German National People's Party (including Stahlhelm)	3 million
German People's Party	1 million

That is to say: In the event of a war being forced on Germany, more than half of the population consists of people who are either more or less pacifist or else consciously hostile to defense and military matters. The opinion of some generals that military training (in a sudden war it could only be very brief) would eradicate ideological indoctrination by political parties is positively puerile. Even the two years military service [before 1914] in peacetime did not damage the SPD. To say that the SPD workers nevertheless did their duty in 1914 is wrong. For it was not the convinced Marxist who did his duty but the German in the Marxist who was stirred enough temporarily to renounce Marxism. The convinced Marxist leadership was already beginning to fight back in 1915 and, after remarkable and splendid resistance on the part of the population, finally in 1918 provoked a revolution and thereby caused the collapse of the Reich.

The Social Democracy of those days cannot be remotely compared with the KPD of today. In 1914 Marxism was a theory; today it dominates in practice an enormous part of the world. A war fought by Germany in its present state would from the start subject the whole nation to a test of nerves which, as far as the home front is concerned at any rate, would bear no comparison with similar events in the World War.

The idea that in this case one can fall back on the nationalist leagues is very flattering for these organizations which nowadays suffer such abuse and persecution but is likely to be not only of no practical significance, but rather produce fearful consequences. For, if the nationalist elements are called up and moved to the front as more or less untrained cannon fodder, the homeland would then be simultaneously delivered into the hands of the red mob. The year 1918 was child's play compared with what would happen then.

Thus, while our political and military strategists regard German rearmament as a technical or organizational matter, I see the precondition for any rearmament as the creation of a new German national unity of mind and of will. Without the solution of this problem all talk of 'equality of rights' and 'rearmament' is superficial and idle chatter.

This creation of a unity of ideology, mind, and will among our people is the task which I set myself fourteen years ago and which I have struggled to achieve ever since. I am not surprised that our official civil and military agencies treat this problem with a total lack of understanding, not to say stupidity. It has always been thus throughout history. No great ideas and reforms of humanity have ever come from the professionals. Why should it be any different today. However, recognition of this historical truth does not relieve the person who has taken the measure of this question in all its enormous significance from the duty of working to resolve it. I must, therefore, however regretfully, make a stand against, indeed must combat, any German government which is not ready and determined to carry out this inward rearmament of the German nation. All other measures follow from it.

I consider the present cabinet of General von Schleicher to be particularly unfortunate because through the person of its leader alone it must show even less appreciation of this question than any other would

do. This time, as ever in history, this problem of the intellectual rearmament of the nation cannot be solved by an army but only by an ideology. To involve the Army in the matter makes it appear prejudiced in many people's eyes just as such an involvement thereby compromises the task itself in the eyes of the masses. For, neither the police nor the military have ever destroyed ideologies even less have they been able to construct them. However, no human structure can survive in the long term without an ideology. Ideologies are the social contracts and bases on which substantial human organizations have to be built. Thus, in contrast to our present statesmen I see Germany's tasks for the future as follows:

1. Overcoming Marxism and its consequences until they have been completely exterminated. The creation of a new unity of mind and will for our people.
2. A general intellectual and moral rearmament of the nation on the basis of this new ideological unity.
3. Technical rearmament.
4. The organizational mobilization of the national resources for the purpose of national defense.
5. Once this has been achieved, the securing of the legal recognition of the new situation by the rest of the world.

Only a deep-rooted process of regeneration instead of the present experimentation and continual seeking after new and petty palliatives can bring about a final and clear-cut solution to the German crisis. I would be grateful, Colonel, if you would judge my behavior in the light of this view.

[...]

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