

**The Chargé in Finland (McClintock) to the Secretary of State** <sup>46</sup>

**Helsinki, January 21, 1943—10 p.m.  
[Received January 22—6:50 a.m.]**

116. President Ryti asked me to see him this afternoon. He recalled telling Minister Schoenfeld of his desire to see me from time to time and of his willingness to maintain contact with Legation. Having in mind past instances in which Mr. Procopé's impressions of conversations in Department had differed from that of Department, I had prepared a paraphrase of part 1 of your 13, January 18, and during course of our conversation asked President to read it. He thanked me and said he was very glad to have this paraphrase as Mr. Procopé had reported quite differently of his interview on January 15. I summarized orally part 2 of your telegram and also left with President texts of Atlantic Charter<sup>47</sup> and Declaration of United Nations.<sup>48</sup>

After reading paraphrase President Ryti said that reference to Finland having opportunity to independence and integrity only through victory of United Nations was new element in the diplomatic correspondence of past 18 months. I agreed and expressed purely personal and unofficial opinion that possibly in Atlantic Charter and declaration of United Nations Finland might find formula by which it could get on the right side in this war. I said I had no doubt whatever that Germany was losing and I supposed that various Allies and co-belligerents of Germany were wondering what to do when this defeat became absolute.

Mr. Ryti said he had from the start thought Germany would lose war. However, he hoped that before going Germany would defeat or utterly exhaust Russia. He reemphasized usual clichés of Finland's "separate war" fact that it was fighting in self defense against Russian aggression and that it had no political commitments to Germany.

He said he could tell me in confidence that during past inactive year on Finnish front, Finnish Army had suffered casualties in entire 12 months which were only two-thirds of a single month's casualties during summer of 1941. He said last December all Finnish casualties totalled only 900 which was remarkable for an army numbering several hundreds of thousands of men holding a front of 1,000 kilometers. He said for their part Russians too had been quiet and pointed to fact that neither in autumn of 1941 nor now when military operations at Leningrad were in active phase had Russians sought to attack on Finnish side of Leningrad front.

President Ryti told me in secrecy—and he ventured hope our codes were safe—that only once during Finland's relationship of co-belligerency with Germany had Germans made request of Finnish Government for renewed defensive [offensive] against Russia. This request he said Finns had declined.

As for Finnish policy President Ryti said that it had been, and would continue to be on a day to day basis. He said that Finns could not at all trust Russians or any agreement with them and asked if I knew what Russians and British had agreed to in respect of Baltic States. He said that he had received confidential information of Mr. Eden's agreement with Molotov in Moscow last year<sup>49</sup> that Baltic States were to be given to USSR. I said I had noted this in his speech at opening of Diet on February 3 last year. I added I was without official information on this point but that I had read in book *How War Came*<sup>50</sup> whose authors seemed to be close to official sources in Washington, an interesting chapter on Mr. Molotov's visit to London and Washington<sup>51</sup> and that from this account it appeared that it was American influence which had prevented British and Russians agreeing to premature territorial division of post-war Europe. I reminded President that since 1931 official American policy had been non-recognition of transfer of territory by force. I read again, however, Mr. Welles' statement to Mr. Procope that friendly relations with the United States must be based on modification of Finland's policy of collaboration with Germany. Mr. Ryti seemed quite unmoved by

this statement, nor was he impressed at Finland's possibility of "obliteration" at the hands of Germany. He seemed calmly confident that all Finland had to do was sit tight and await a Russian collapse. With typical Finnish egoism, he said at one point in conversation that Finland had probably helped Germany more than would have been the case had it been a formal ally because it had carried on its "defensive war" against Russia with such zeal in 1941. He said that Germany owed more to Finland than Finland to Germany because Finnish Army had kept 25 Russian divisions out of fight against Wehrmacht.

Returning to President's reference to Finland's "separate war" I said that if one accepted this thesis it had corollary of concept of a separate peace with all the risks that might involve for a small country confronting a great power. I expressed personal opinion that in framework of United Nations, Finland or any other country would have possibility to secure the advantages of a collective peace and would have seat at the conference table.

As for a separate peace Mr. Ryti said that his Government had no contact with the Soviet Government. He had heard through Swedish sources however that persons connected with Soviet Legation in Stockholm regarded all present Finnish leaders as unsuitable and had said that only a completely new government would be acceptable to Moscow. This, President said, would probably mean establishment of a Kuusinen regime<sup>52</sup> in Helsinki.

Mr. Ryti said that Finland's great hope was that Russia would be beaten. If it was, they could live 20 years in peace. He said, in fact, Russia had already lost one-third of its population and present great offensives were even more exhausting its national strength. He did not think that if Russia were utterly worn out or beaten at end of war the other United Nations would fail to treat Finland fairly. Atlantic Charter seemed to apply to vanquished as well as victors. I replied that many of United Nations were even now represented by governments [in] exile but that I was sure the other United Nations would see to it that they were restored to their territories and rights after the war. So with Russia, even if it were defeated by Germany—which did not seem the case at present—the other United Nations had an obligation to see that Russia, too, was restored. I had impression that President Ryti had never thought of matter in this light.

President Ryti said he was convinced that a strong Germany was essential to welfare of Europe as a counterbalance to Russia. He did not think such a Germany could have a democratic form of government as Germans were not apt to democracy. They had had their Kaisers and might again. The Germans' contribution to civilization had been largely in the realm of "Kultur". Rather surprisingly he said that he knew many German generals who were "gentlemen" but that party people in Germany were of quite a different stripe and he did not like them at all. I had impression he had in back of his mind the idea of a "generals' government" which should oust the Nazis from power in Germany.

President spoke of a Nordic federation and said he thought it would afford a solution for the four northern countries. Had such a federation been in existence before outbreak of present war and had other three Scandinavian States been as well prepared militarily as Finland they would still be free and neutral today. He went into history of Finland's efforts to organize defensive alliance with Sweden in 1940<sup>53</sup> emphasizing it was Russian refusal to countenance this alliance which forced an end to negotiations. He also referred to private attempt of Prime Minister Churchill<sup>54</sup> to influence Marshal Mannerheim to cease hostilities. I recalled Mr. Churchill's warning to Marshal that Finland might find itself "in same dock with guilty and defeated Nazis" and added that it was ironic that British Government should have had to declare war on Finland<sup>55</sup> almost on very day that Finnish Army had reached limit of its advance. President said that this was indeed true and that he had considered possibility of Marshal Mannerheim responding more affirmatively to Mr. Churchill by saying openly that Finns did not intend to go further. He said, however, that Marshal had refused to do this on grounds that letter might be published and that in any case it was not an honorable way to deal with Finland's co-belligerent, Germany. I had clear impression, however, that Ryti favored the former course.

President repeated usual Finnish comment that Finns could not bring themselves to believe that Britain was serious in its declaration of war and that they could not think of themselves as being regarded as enemies by British. He said that any day Britain was ready to “declare peace” with Finland he would be glad to do it also.

As for Finland’s economic position President said weather this year had been better and it has been possible to plow greater area this autumn than ever before. He was well aware of fact that as Germany’s war potential declined, Finland’s economic position so far as it was dependent on Germany would decline too. However, he gave me to understand nation was husbanding its resources against that day. We were “too far” away to help Finland with supplies so long as Germans had Petsamo, he added.

President said he would like to show my paraphrase of your 13, January 18, to Foreign Minister and Prime Minister. I asked if he would also be kind enough to show it and appended copies of Atlantic Charter and Declaration of United Nations to Marshal Mannerheim. He said he would and that he thought he would be going to headquarters rather soon to see the Marshal. Baron Mannerheim,

he said, had not been in good health of late and his spirits were low because of worry as to his condition. For some weeks he had been running a low grade fever and in addition was bothered by gout and dental trouble. In particular, Marshal was fretful over refusal of certain of tooth cavities to heal following recent operation and insisted this proved his vital force was leaving him. I have heard from General Kekoni<sup>56</sup> also that Marshal is not in very good health.

My impressions from this interview are:

1. Procopé did not report his conversation with Mr. Welles on January 15 at all in sense of your 13.
2. President recognizes fact that this telegram embodied a new concept of security for Finland through victory of United Nations but seems so convinced of Russian duplicity and of American willingness to save Finland anyhow, that he thinks he can get the benefits of Atlantic Charter without the presumed liability of signing a document to which USSR is also signatory.
3. Finland’s “policy” if it can be called such, seems based on possibility of Soviet exhaustion before German defeat.
4. Finnish Government seeks to lie low with a minimum expenditure of nation’s military or economic energy waiting like Micawber for “something to turn up”.

MCCLINTOCK

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46. In a memorandum of January 23, 1943, commenting on this telegram, L. Randolph Higgs of the Division of European Affairs stated that there were no particularly new elements in the attitude of President Ryti, except perhaps that he seemed to have “a somewhat stronger and possibly new desire to maintain friendly relations with us.” Mr. Higgs saw no need for action by the Department unless it might be advisable to approach the Finns anew with the aim of inducing them to negotiate a peace with the Soviet Union. (860D.00/1071)
  47. Joint statement by President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill, August 14, 1941, [Foreign Relations, 1941, vol. i, p. 367](#).
  48. Declaration of January 1, 1942, by the United Nations which subscribed to the Atlantic Charter; for text, see [ibid., 1942, vol. i, p. 25](#).
  49. For correspondence regarding discussions on this subject between the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Anthony Eden, and Soviet officials in Moscow during December 19–22, 1941, see [Foreign Relations, 1941, vol. i, pp. 192–205](#).
  50. Forrest Davis and Ernest K. Lindley, *How War Came* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1942).

51. For correspondence concerning the visit of Soviet Foreign Commissar Molotov to London and Washington during May and June 1942, see [Foreign Relations, 1942, vol. iii, pp. 543–599](#), passim.
52. The reference is to Otto Wilhelm Kuusinen, a former Finnish Social Democrat who had become a Soviet citizen, and to the Soviet puppet government of the “Finnish Democratic Republic” set up on November 30, 1939, in Terijoki, of which Kuusinen was Premier and Foreign Minister. See [Foreign Relations, 1939, vol. i, pp. 1013 ff.](#)
53. See telegrams No. 315, March 20, 1940, from the Ambassador in the Soviet Union, No. 165, March 28, 1940, from the Minister in Finland, and No. 164, April 4, 1940, from the Minister in Sweden, [Foreign Relations, 1940, vol. i, pp. 318, 322, and 325](#), respectively.
54. British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill.
55. On December 6, 1941, Great Britain declared war on Finland.
56. Maj. Gen. Heikki Kekoni, representative in Helsinki of Commander in Chief Mannerheim.

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Source: Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, the Far East, Volume III, 116.

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