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Helsinki 25 March 1942.

Highly Esteemed Mr. Field Marshal G. Mannerheim.

General Headquarters.
Mikkeli.

Highly Esteemed Mr. Field Marshal !

In order to revert to the question we discussed about yesterday, I have to tell it rightaway that when I reconsidered it more closely, great doubts on it crossed my mind. From the operative point of view the plan was interesting, no doubts on it. I also agree that it can be carried out. No doubt that by it our front lines can be improved to some extent but simultaneously the service lines of the enemy at the most important section of the front will become easier to maintain, especially when the White Sea will be icefree. But in any case carrying out the plan would only be a partial solution. Soroka or Suma will not be reached. An attack around Parandova would probably make the enemy to reason that we are aiming at something farther away and might thus make it concentrate against us troops comparable in size to those needed to defend Soroka or Suma. In that case we would be jammed into tough fights. On the other hand it is not probable that those 5 Russian divisions, now on line between Poventsa and Lake Seesjärvi were voluntarily retreating even if their railway connection at Parandova were cut. On the contrary, it would be more of Russian style that even when encircled they would make tough and long-lasting resistance and so drawing the whole [our] Maaselkä Group to fierce battles. These battles into which both our troops in Maaselkä and Rukajärvi would be drawn, would certainly lead to considerable number of casualties and would cause substantial consumption of material that are not in right proportion to what can be achieved. From the German side probably no relief is to be expected in these fights, except perhaps some limited aerial support. Otherwise, in view of coming summer and when the White Sea gets rid of its ice cover, conquering Soroka or Suma would not reach its real value earlier than in the winter of 1942-43.

But are we still then at war with the Russians? If we are, the more necessary it will be to spare, within the bounds of possibility, our strengths, equipment and stores. Maybe, there is a possibility, hopefully a very small one, but however to be accounted for, namely that the Germans are forced to retreat on the St Petersburg front. This event would, without any doubt,

cause us great difficulties and hazards, which would be even greater if, simultaneously, all our troops in Maanselkä and furthermore, in Rukajärvi are bound to heavy fighting.

Also the possible risk to run into conflict with the US caused by this prospected offensive should be considered. Nevertheless, I suppose that America will declare war on us if she considers it to be useful for her, totally irrespective of what we do or not. She herself hardly desires any war against Finland but as a reaction to Russian demands she can do like what England formerly did. Our offensive towards Soroka may give occasion for the Russians to increase pressure on the Americans to declare war on us, as well as lowering the level of American reluctance against this sort of demand. I also consider it being questionable if we in one way or another let America know that our offensive will stop after this or that target and trying this way to alleviate the possibly negative impression of the effort.

If Germany's and her allies' invasion on the main fronts in spring will be as successful as expected and the Russians are decisively defeated, the situation on our fronts will be solved relatively easily, also if the planned offensive is now dropped. If their offensive yet fails and the Russians are victorious, it is better that we have not advanced too far. When we, for our part, have reached on the whole, what we planned for in the beginning of the war but the Germans, for their part, in the North totally lag behind of what they were expected to carry out, the Germans then would probably make no remarks about our relative passivity in the current situation. We still do tie down twenty Russian divisions, which requires of us relatively greater efforts and sacrifices than any of Germany's allies proper now contributes. And, the redeployment of our troops is still on the way and the poor quality of our transport equipment would certainly lead into difficulties in carrying out the offensive, especially when it, at least partly, would need to be carried out in the season of bad roads.

It is possible that my doubts and worries are groundless and my motives do not reflect reality. I mentioned about it to [defence minister] Walden. With others I, concerning the nature of the matter, did not want to discuss.

Also this letter I wrote in my bad handwriting. You, Mr. Field Marshal, are naturally free to use your own discretion to form your own judgement about this matter. In accordance with my promise I have anyway wanted to express my doubts.

With my most respectful consideration,

RISTO RYTI.