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740.0011 European War 1939/12291: Telegram

The Minister in Finland (Schoenfeld) to the Secretary of State

Helsinki, June 22, 1941—3 p.m.
[Received 10:40 p.m.]

212. Minister for Foreign Affairs informed me this afternoon that Russian airplanes at 6 this morning had dropped bombs on the two Finnish coast defense battleships anchored at Korpo in Western Archipelago as well as on certain islands around Uto in same neighborhood where fires were reported though details of this action were not available. Early this morning large flight of unidentified planes were also over Wilmastrand in eastern Finland but no bombs were dropped and Minister did not know whether planes were Russian or German. Civil population has been evacuated from entire southeastern frontier area.

The Minister said it was Finland's firm purpose to remain aloof from German-Soviet war as long as possible and if forced into the war, to wit: withdraw from it as soon as possible. He felt next few days would be the most critical since he expected that within 2 or 3 weeks Germans would command south shore of Gulf of Finland and thereby minimize danger of Russian air attack.

I asked Witting whether he had known of Molotov's alleged inquiry of Hitler last fall as to German attitude in event of renewed hostilities between Russia and Finland which inquiry and Hitler's reported answer were mentioned in Hitler's proclamation to German people this morning. Witting answered that he had been informed of substance of this inquiry immediately after Molotov's visit to Berlin⁹⁸ but that it had been made known here to only two other persons, presumably President Ryti and Field Marshal Mannerheim. This fact seems to explain much in the apparent pro-German trend of Finnish policy since the end of last year, as well as President Ryti's and Field Marshal Mannerheim's statements to me as reported since beginning of this year.

Witting said that military authorities had pressed for Finnish mobilization from the early days of this month when uneasiness regarding German-Soviet relations first became acute and that he had opposed it on two occasions but had finally conceded necessity thereof prior to decision for complete mobilization about June 18. He pointed out that Finland could not afford to be caught as Poland had been in the midst of mobilization.

Witting expressed grave concern regarding food situation especially in view of greatly increased consumption by mobilized troops. President Ryti spoke in the same sense when I saw him June 20 and Witting today indicated that prior to latest developments he had some hope that British-American action in suspending Petsamo traffic might be modified.

Foreign Minister said it is not now intended to evacuate Helsinki, especially as all who could had left for the country following private and unofficial urging in recent weeks. I understand German civilians are not being evacuated as they were in last war here. I do not now plan to evacuate Legation personnel from here.

Secretary General of the Foreign Office whom I also saw today said that Russians had increased their forces in Finnish border area but had done so very quietly, particularly around Viipuri.

Witting was characteristically calm but admitted entire uncertainty as to early future. Situation seems to be that Finland will take no offensive action even if air bombing first above reported is fully confirmed. I feel, however, that Finns will be resolute in endeavoring to recover their territory

lost by the treaty of March last year should events make their active participation in present hostilities against U. S. S. R. inevitable.

SCHOENFELD

- ⁹⁸. This visit occurred between November 12 and 14, 1940; see *Foreign Relations, 1940*, vol. i, pp. 573–582, passim, German accounts of the conversations held during this visit have been published in Department of State, *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939–1941* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1948), pp. 217–255.

Source: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1941v01/d53>