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SECRET.

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CABINET.

POSITION OF BELGIUM AND THE PROPOSED FIVE-POWER
CONFERENCE.

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

L. Fortino
I CIRCULATE to my colleagues as annexes to this memorandum a despatch to His Majesty's Ambassador at Brussels recording my conversations on the 27th and 28th November with the Belgian Prime Minister (Annex A) and a telegram from Sir E. Ovey giving the text of the relevant ~~positions~~ of M. van Zeeland's statement in the Belgian Parliament on the 2nd December respecting Belgium's position in relation to the negotiations for the proposed Five-Power Treaty. Much of the information contained in these two reports was already known to us, but in the light of it and of earlier reports it will be convenient once more to state briefly the position of the Belgian Government:—

- (a) Belgium, in accordance with her undertaking given in London in March, adheres provisionally to her obligations under the Treaty of Locarno of 1925, but she "wishes the new agreement at which we are aiming to be concluded as quickly as possible." Her existing obligations in this matter "must not be allowed to crystallise into permanent obligations and the provisional period could not last much longer."
- (b) Belgium will not give guarantees to other States in any new treaty, but she will take defensive measures to prevent Belgian territory being used by an aggressor State as a passage or base of operations. (N.B.—It is still not absolutely clear that this refers also to the air.)
- (c) Belgium will continue her membership of the League of Nations and her fidelity to her obligations under the Covenant, though of those obligations, and particularly of article 16, Belgium "will accept no other interpretation than that which she thinks proper to give as a sovereign State." She cannot, for example, allow the question of the passage of troops across her territory under paragraph 3 of article 16 of the Covenant to be decided over her head by France or some other outside body.
- (d) M. van Zeeland did not, in my conversation with him, exclude the possibility of Belgium undertaking under the proposed new treaty to furnish France and Great Britain with information designed to assure them of the efficacy of her defences, but he stipulated that Belgium must be free to give similar information to Germany if the latter required it. In the Belgian Parliament he added that "we require a military system which shall not permanently be directed against anyone nor tied up in a permanent fashion with the military conceptions of anyone else." (N.B.—This does not suggest that the Belgian Government are likely readily to communicate their defence plans to the French Government as desired by the latter.)
- (e) As the Belgian Government expect the negotiations for the new Western Treaty to break down on the question of the safeguarding of France's treaty relations with Russia, M. van Zeeland suggested to me that

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an attempt might then be made to negotiate a treaty under which Germany, Great Britain, France, and possibly also Italy, would guarantee Belgium's independence and integrity, and possibly that of the Netherlands; and he seemed to suggest that this treaty might be followed by a second treaty between Britain and France, or between Britain, France and Germany, guaranteeing the German-French frontier as it was guaranteed under the Treaty of Locarno; Belgium would not be a party to this second treaty.

2. In passing I should like to deal first with M. van Zeeland's desire to conclude the provisional period, *i.e.*, the continuance of the obligations of the existing Treaty of Locarno, as speedily as possible. *With regard to this, I propose to ask him to await the conclusion of the exchanges of views at present proceeding between the five Locarno Powers before calling in question the duration of the provisional period, and even then to make no definite move without reference to me.*

3. Meanwhile, we must face the fact that the present exchange of views may demonstrate sooner rather than later that no agreement is possible on the basis of the old Locarno Treaty. We had better therefore consider what courses will be open to us in the case of such a breakdown. Three courses have been suggested at different times:—

- (a) The course outlined in the Letters which His Majesty's Government addressed to the French and Belgian Governments on the 1st April last (Annex C).
- (b) The course now proposed by M. van Zeeland, as explained in paragraph 1 (e).
- (c) A system whereby His Majesty's Government would, instead of entering into any agreements with other Powers, merely state by means of a declaration made in the most formal manner that it is a vital British interest that the independence and integrity of Belgium (and possibly also the Netherlands) should be maintained, and that the Franco-German frontier should not be violated, and that they intend therefore to intervene whenever they think it necessary in order to ensure the respect of this vital interest.

4. Under the letters of the 1st April we undertook, should "the effort of conciliation" (based on a Western treaty of mutual assistance) fail, to consider with France and Belgium the situation thus created, to come to the assistance of the two countries in respect of any measures jointly decided upon, to take all practicable measures for assuring their security against unprovoked aggression, and to establish contacts between the General Staffs. France undertook to take similar action, but Belgium did not reply to our letter. In view of the attitude now developed by the Belgian Government, it is impossible to carry out these promises in the form of a mutual guarantee treaty between the three Powers, as was evidently contemplated: but the essence of these promises could be kept by adopting courses (b) or (c) as will be shown by the following paragraphs.

5. At first sight M. van Zeeland's proposal holds certain attractions. If Germany shows a modicum of goodwill it ought to be possible for her to become a party to the Belgian Guarantee Treaty and thus to continue to co-operate with the other Western Powers in the maintenance of the *status quo* in Western Europe. Also it probably represents the greatest measure of co-operation that we can in present circumstances hope to extract from Belgium, and there is the danger that, unless we accept the offer now, it may be withdrawn and Belgium, perhaps under another Prime Minister than M. van Zeeland, may gradually be drawn into the German orbit. On the other hand, the proposed Belgian Treaty has an unpleasant resemblance to the fateful "neutralisation" treaty of 1839, and although M. van Zeeland assures us that Belgium has no wish to return to her pre-war "neutrality" and has every intention of continuing to fulfil her League obligations, nevertheless, the very character of the treaty will certainly strengthen the present Belgian inclination to resist any effort by Great Britain or France to make their guarantee effective by assuring themselves that Belgium is contributing effectively to her own defence. Still less will Belgium under such a treaty be inclined to co-operate in any way with Great Britain or France in the general defence of the territorial *status quo* of Western Europe. But even more

important than these considerations is the fact that the French Government can and would claim that under our letter of the 1st April she could not be asked to accept M. van Zeeland's treaty, unless adequate provision were made at the same time to secure to France the guarantee which she at present receives from Great Britain. This could only be done by means of a separate Anglo-French treaty, which, unless Germany could be induced to join it, would have all the appearance of an Anglo-French alliance against Germany. It would be difficult to induce Italy to join such a treaty unless Germany did so too. As for Germany, all her objections which, presumably, will have rendered impossible a new Locarno Treaty—France's Eastern commitments, League of Nations control, a French guarantee to Great Britain, &c.—would be equally present when it came to formulating this more limited treaty. If it had been impossible to meet Germany's objections in the case of the proposed Five-Power Treaty, this difficulty would be in no sense reduced by the fact that Belgium was now excluded from the scope of this more limited treaty.

6. There remains the declaratory method. If His Majesty's Government made a declaration as outlined in paragraph 3 (c) it would, of course, be essential that France should make a similar declaration guaranteeing this country and Belgium (and, possibly, the Netherlands). The advantage of the declaratory method is that it leaves the door open to future detailed agreements with other Powers if and when necessary, while it relieves His Majesty's Government of having to take an early decision in favour of an Anglo-French treaty. At the same time this system would enable His Majesty's Government to fulfil in their essentials the promises they made to France in the letter of the 1st April, and at the same time it would give His Majesty's Government and France a *locus standi*, if they desired it, for pressing Belgium for assurances regarding the efficacy of her defences and for a measure of co-operation in the common defence of the *status quo* in Western Europe.

7. I do not wish to suggest that His Majesty's Government should here and now make their choice between these two courses. It is difficult at the present moment to foresee how matters are going to develop, and I would wish to keep my hands free until I can form a more accurate estimate than is possible at present of the prospects of the new "Locarno" treaty, and of the causes which are likely to render it impossible for such a treaty to materialise in present conditions. *I would propose, therefore, to warn M. van Zeeland that I see serious difficulties in the way of his new plan, and that I would be grateful if he would therefore abstain from putting it forward, even unofficially, until the situation has further developed. I would add, however, to M. van Zeeland that I saw considerable advantage in his carrying out the suggestion he made to me, of finding some early excuse for an unofficial visit to Paris for conversation with the French Government.*

8. Superimposed upon this problem of future policy is the more immediate question which has been created by the action of the Belgian Government in withholding in any future treaty the guarantee which Belgium has, hitherto, given to France. The French Government are pressing for consultation with His Majesty's Government in order to settle what measure of co-operation should still be required of Belgium in the absence of Belgium's former guarantee. This question arises primarily in connexion with the exchange of views now proceeding regarding a new "Locarno" treaty, but it will subsist in the case where, as a result of such "Locarno" treaty failing to materialise, His Majesty's Government are called upon to adopt any of the other courses which I have examined in this paper. An early decision is necessary, as the French Government are pressing to know our views on the subject.

9. The position is as follows: Since the war we have always proceeded on the assumption that Belgium should co-operate as a full and active collaborator in the mutual defence of the territorial *status quo* in Western Europe. This assumption derived from the conviction that the previous policy of Belgium's neutralisation, which had existed from 1839-1914, had failed lamentably when put to the test in the latter year. This policy of full co-operation was not only formally embodied in the Treaty of Locarno, but it forms the basis on which His Majesty's Government are at present conducting their negotiations for a new Western Pact of Mutual Guarantee.

10. Its object is to try to make our guarantee effective by enlisting the co-operation of Belgium in the defence of the territorial *status que* of Western Europe and ensuring that she contributes effectively to her own defence. In pursuance of this policy, the French wish to obtain a positive undertaking from the Belgian Government that Belgium will, under paragraph 3 of Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations (Annex D) give passage over her territory to a France acting against Germany when declared to be an aggressor; that the Belgian Government will communicate their defence plans to the French Government; and that positions will be prepared in Belgian territory which French troops can take up before Germany enters it. Is it desirable that His Majesty's Government should support the French in these demands and that the Belgian Government should, in addition, be called upon to define their undertaking to forbid access to Belgian territory, so as to make it clear that they will resist not only a violation by the German Army of Belgian territory, but also of Belgian air by German aircraft?

11. The main argument in favour of the policy of co-operation seems to be that it is a great risk to be committed to a guarantee of Belgian independence and integrity without receiving in return any assurances from Belgium as to her future plans and policy under the new Treaty. The giving of a guarantee to Belgium is a much more serious matter now than when the Treaty of Locarno was negotiated in 1925. At that time the German Army was confined within the limits of the Treaty of Versailles and the Rhineland was demilitarised. Yet in those days we enjoyed the indirect benefit of the guarantee which Belgium gave to France. That guarantee is now to go and, as things stand at present, we shall, after the expiry of the present provisional period, be left only with some general statements of good intentions by the Belgian Prime Minister, who may be out of power and disowned to-morrow. It is comprehensible that the French will not be satisfied with such a situation, and will press for its improvement.

12. The alternative policy is to try to produce a situation in which we and the French can base our plans on the assumption that Germany will not violate Belgian territory or air; and which will ensure the greatest possible chance of Belgium keeping out of any war. To judge from recent reports submitted by the Chiefs of Staff, I gather that they would propose the complete abandonment of the policy of co-operation with Belgium, and its replacement by a policy of what they described as Belgian "neutrality," but which would be more correctly designated as "non-belligerency." Not only do they deprecate any co-operation between Belgium on the one side and France and Great Britain on the other for the better defence of Belgium's independence and integrity; they would go even further and restore in its entirety the pre-war system whereby Belgium as a "neutralised State" was forbidden to undertake any commitments or obligations which might lead her to become a belligerent in certain circumstances. For this purpose it would seem that they would welcome action whereby Belgium would be formally released from those obligations which are binding upon her in virtue of Article 16 of the Covenant.

13. In support of this view it might, I suppose, be argued that if Belgium is "neutral" (or non-belligerent), the violation of Belgian territory by Germany could appear to the world in no other light than wanton aggression. Be that as it may, world indignation, however intense, would not drive the German army out of Belgium in a future war any more than it did in 1914. It might perhaps also be said that if Belgium were "neutral" (or non-belligerent), there would be less chance of the violation of her territory by Germany than in 1914, because the Belgian defences are stronger than then. But even if that is the case, would not the adoption by Belgium of such a position diminish the pressure which could be brought upon her by France and this country to maintain adequate defences; and what guarantee should we have that, as the years passed, those defences would not become inadequate and increasingly inadequate? Our leverage might, in fact, vanish at any time, and thus would disappear one of the arguments on which the recommendation of the Chiefs of Staff is founded. Again, it might be urged that new deterrents to German aggression have been created by the proposed extension of the Maginot line to the sea and the fact that it is now known that Britain will certainly fight for the security of Belgium. But the extended Maginot line is still only in process of construction; and, as regards the German view of the certainty

of British intervention, reference may be made to a telegram from His Majesty's Ambassador at Berlin of the 25th November. It is there stated that the information of the higher Nazi circles is that the British public will not fight again for France or Belgium for at least a generation, and that the fighting spirit is so dormant in England that only an attack on the Empire would awaken it.

14. In the light of these observations some doubt is legitimate whether the German General Staff may not still hold that Belgium is the easiest line of advance on Paris and the Channel ports; and in this connexion it is perhaps legitimate to point out that, as compared with 1914, the vulnerability of the United Kingdom and, therefore, presumably, the attractiveness of any direct route to the United Kingdom, has been increased by the development of the air weapon. In fact, everything seems to confirm the earlier view of the Chiefs of Staff that the chances of Belgian "neutrality" being maintained throughout a Western European war are remote. I would go further and say that they are so remote as to be almost negligible. Nevertheless, in their latest reports the Chiefs of Staff would appear to recommend that our policy and our strategy should be based entirely on this admittedly remote possibility.

15. To me this seems to constitute a risk which is altogether too great and which we ought not to be invited to run until it is absolutely unavoidable. In other words, the arguments which have been advanced so far have not convinced me that it is either desirable or safe to alter the policy of co-operation with Belgium which France, and to a less extent His Majesty's Government, have followed since the war.

16. Moreover, by recommending for Belgium a policy of non-co-operation we should be going further than M. van Zeeland, who, to judge from his conversations, is prepared for some measure of co-operation. In any case, he has never suggested that Belgium should be free from her obligations under Article 16 of the Covenant. All that he has stipulated is that Belgium should be free to interpret them herself. If now Belgium were, for *our* purposes, relieved of these obligations, other States might well desire the same advantages for *their* purposes; and the disintegration of the League in its present form would thus have received a considerable impulsion at our hands. On the other hand, by showing the Belgians that we are in favour of some measure of co-operation, we shall strengthen the hands of those Belgians who are anxious to co-operate with us in defence of Belgian territory and shall correspondingly weaken those who, in the face of the growing menace of Germany, are ready to submit to German influence and, if need be, German dictation.

17. In principle therefore I adhere to a policy of co-operation between the United Kingdom, France and Belgium. But since in practice it is clear that Belgium is not likely to go beyond the attitude which M. van Zeeland has now taken up towards Article 16 of the Covenant, and towards the communication of defence plans, I should propose to take the following line in discussing with the French and Belgian Governments the points which the French have raised with me in connection with the Belgian decision to give no guarantee under the proposed new "Locarno" Treaty:—

(1) *The French Government having raised the question of Belgium's responsibilities under paragraph 3 of Article 16 of the Covenant in the matter of the passage of troops across Belgian territory, I would propose to advise them to agree with M. van Zeeland to accept as the best solution that can be obtained in the circumstances the assurance which he is apparently ready to give, to the effect that he recognises Belgium's obligations under paragraph 3 of Article 16, provided that Belgium is alone judge of the circumstances when, and extent to which, she shall carry out these obligations.*

(2) *I should ask the Belgian Government (again either alone or jointly with the French) to define their undertaking to forbid access to their territory, so as to mean that they will resist not only a violation by the German army of Belgian territory, but also of Belgian air by German aircraft. This seems particularly important for us.*

(3) *I should urge the Belgian Government to do all they can to remove the present uncertainty as regards their attitude towards co-operation with the French, and impress upon them the importance that both we and the French attach*

to being assured at regular intervals that Belgium is continuing to maintain her defences in such a state of efficiency as really to be able to carry out her undertaking not to grant access to her territory or allow it to serve as a passage or base for operations for German military or aeronautical forces. Again this seems of vital importance to us; and its reasonableness has been admitted by M. van Zeeland.

(4) In discussing with the French the question of urging the Belgians to define the extent to which they are prepared to co-operate with France, I should make it clear that, although I sympathise with the desire of the French to remove the present uncertainty, I am not prepared to take part in any detailed discussions with regard to the actual French proposals (i.e., communication of defence plans, and the preparation of positions in Belgian territory for French troops), since His Majesty's Government themselves do not wish to participate in such measures of co-operation. The latter desideratum I am satisfied that the Belgian Government would not in any circumstances grant.

Foreign Office, December 5, 1936.

ANNEX A.

Mr. Eden to Sir E. Ovey (Brussels).

(No. 608.)

Sir,

Foreign Office, November 30, 1936.

THE Belgian Prime Minister took the opportunity of his recent visit to London to explain to me the present attitude of the Belgian Government as a result of the situation created by the withdrawal by Belgium of the guarantee she has hitherto given to France.

M. van Zeeland stressed the fact that he had never used the word "neutrality" in describing Belgium's new position, and insisted that he had no wish to see Belgium return to the position of a neutralised State as before 1914. On the contrary, he stated definitely that the Belgian Government considered themselves bound by all their existing obligations, that is to say, by the Covenant of the League and by the arrangement of the 19th March, which kept alive the conditions of the Locarno Treaty as between Great Britain, France and Belgium.

As regards the Covenant, M. van Zeeland did not deny that in certain circumstances Belgium was bound by paragraph 3 of article 16 as regards the passage of troops across her territory. The point, however, he did insist upon was that Belgium should in every case be the judge as to when and whether these circumstances had arisen; he could not allow this question to be decided over the head of Belgium by France or by any outside body.

As regards Belgium's obligations under the arrangement of the 19th March, M. van Zeeland stressed the fact that these obligations were clearly of a provisional character. They clearly must not be allowed to crystallise into permanent obligations, and he warned me that he considered that the provisional period could not last much longer in view of the decreasing prospects of a new Locarno. In case, therefore, of the present negotiations for a new Locarno having to be abandoned, he had been thinking over what could best take the place of this provisional régime, and he now proposed the following plan:—

It was probable that the negotiations for a new Locarno would suffer shipwreck on the rock of France's obligations in the East. It was indeed these same obligations which made it difficult for Belgium to assume commitments *vis-à-vis* of France. On the other hand, there was general agreement between all the parties that Belgium's independence and integrity ought to be guaranteed, and he suggested that a new treaty might be constructed round this nucleus, that is to say, that Germany, Great Britain, France, Belgium, and possibly also Italy, should each agree to guarantee Belgium's independence and integrity. M. van Zeeland considered, moreover, that the Netherlands might be ready to enter into such a treaty on the same terms as Belgium. M. van Zeeland did not exclude

the possibility in such a treaty of Belgium furnishing information to France and Great Britain to assure them of the continued efficacy of Belgium's own defences, but he stipulated that Belgium must be free to give similar information to Germany if the latter required it, as Belgium could not associate herself exclusively with any particular Powers.

M. van Zeeland seemed to suggest that this Belgian guarantee system would be accompanied by an Anglo-French or possibly an Anglo-French-German treaty to guarantee the German-French frontier in the same way as it was guaranteed under the Treaty of Locarno, but Belgium would definitely not be a party to this second treaty.

M. van Zeeland said he had been very disappointed and surprised at the critical attitude which the French had taken up as regards the King of the Belgians' speech. It was pointed out to him that it was only natural that the French should be upset at being suddenly deprived of Belgium's guarantee after the assurances of mutual assistance which had been exchanged last March, and that they should be anxious to see whether they could not save out of the wreckage for the future some measure of technical co-operation between France and Belgium. To this M. van Zeeland replied that he was quite willing, and indeed intended, to initiate further conversations shortly with French Ministers with a view to reassuring them of Belgium's policy and intentions.

I am, &c.

ANTHONY EDEN.

ANNEX B.

Sir E. Ovey to Mr. Eden.—(Received December 3.)

(Telegraphic.) *En clair.*

Brussels, December 3, 1936.

FOLLOWING is the text of M. van Zeeland's remarks in regard to the Treaty of Locarno and the League:—

“ I must here remind you that the conclusion of the Pact of Locarno was a tremendous step forward. The same consideration of independence and of care for the preservation of equilibrium among our neighbours which animates us at the moment went toward the making of it. At Locarno former enemies found themselves placed on a footing of equality, and our country retained the position wherein it believed that it could most effectively play its rôle of peacemaker in the west. I feel that I can say here and now that if we were to find ourselves again in the same circumstances which prevailed at the period when the Treaty of Locarno was signed, in the light of everything which we have since seen, we would have to do again that which we have done. But, in reality, circumstances have been modified; the conceptions which dictated the Treaty of Locarno remain intact, but they must be applied to a situation which has been profoundly changed. The reoccupation of the Rhineland, German rearmament, the weakening of the League of Nations, involve the multiplication of pacts and the confusion which flows from them, all these elements oblige us to adapt our attitude to the new circumstances. Hence the clear-cut position which the Government has taken up and which found its expression in the Royal speech.

“ Gentlemen, somebody has dared in this House to try to establish a distinction (I know not how) between the attitude of the Government and the King's speech. But has the fact been lost sight of that the publication of the King's speech is a declaration of the Government? We live under a parliamentary régime, a régime of constitutional monarchy. The King acts through the intermediary of his Ministers, and it is the Government who bear the responsibility, who endorse, who apply and who make their own the policy so magnificently set out in the Royal speech.” (Applause from the Government side.)

“ However, I would not, I think, be committing any breach of discretion when I say that when at that historical council His Majesty made to his Ministers the communication contained in that famous speech the

spontaneous reaction to it was such that one member of the Cabinet straight away declared: 'There is not one word of this speech to which we cannot subscribe unreservedly.' And, Gentlemen, to this speech, which has become through publication a declaration of the Government, no one has the right to give more or less fantastic or more or less imaginary interpretations. No one has the right to cut it into pieces nor keep that part of it which pleases him and to throw away the rest. The declaration, which is a great declaration, constitutes an entity which must be taken as such. It demonstrates in a marvellous fashion a sacred and indestructible bond which unites in one single conception the views on foreign policy and the views on military policy which are expressed therein. And I do not understand how anybody can dare to invoke the Royal speech and be governed in military affairs by any principle other than those which have animated the King and his Government, in other words the vote on military defence which is submitted to you."

Speaking on a policy of independence M. van Zeeland went on:—

"Independence does not mean an absurd pretension towards isolation, still less a dangerous and blind misappreciation of our duties. On the contrary, we mean to carry out our duties and, as a first step, to put ourselves in a position the better to fulfil them. Small countries, more than anyone else, should be careful scrupulously to respect and, in full, to apply all the obligations which they have undertaken. We have always done this. We always shall, but this is yet a further reason for not undertaking obligations except with prudence and for only undertaking such obligations as we could fulfil and such as are entirely precise, clear and limited; obligations which could not drag us into adventures with which we have nothing to do.

"What are our obligations then? To begin with we are members of the League of Nations. Our position *vis-à-vis* the League of Nations has not changed; we remain convinced that the League of Nations represents a great effort towards a better future. We believe in its usefulness, we believe in its future. No temporary check, however grave, can modify our policy, but we have never thought that the League freed us (from the obligations) to make the maximum effort in our power to protect ourselves. We have always considered it and we will still consider it as a supplementary factor which in certain circumstances could afford us assistance, and I think that we have no right to reject any element which, in difficult moments, could succour us in any degree at all. Alas, if we look facts in the face we must to-day recognise that the support brought or promised by the League and its members is, since the reverse (which it suffered) in the matter of Ethiopia, sensibly reduced. Thus our fidelity to the League of Nations urges us to seek to define, while limiting certainly but at the same time making them perfectly clear, the obligations which are incumbent upon us by virtue of the Covenant until these definitions have been given and particularly as regards article 16. We will accept no other interpretation except that which we think proper to give them as a sovereign State.

"The other kind of international engagements which we have arise from the Treaty of Locarno. They are at the moment provisionally embodied, if I may say so, in the agreements reached in London last March. Again—and that goes without saying—we are strictly and rigorously loyal to these engagements, as to the others; but these London agreements have a provisional character; they are to be replaced by others; they could not in any way be transformed automatically into definite agreements, and we wish the new agreements towards which we are aiming to be concluded as quickly as possible, by whatever method it may be.

"We have clearly defined what position we would take in the negotiations of these new accords; we will no longer give to France and Germany the guarantee which is written down in the accords of Locarno of 1925—a guarantee which none the less at that moment was necessary and justified, a guarantee which would be to-day inefficacious, dangerous and unjustifiable.

"As for saying that we will not assist in the organisation of peace in the west, far from it, we have a great duty to fulfil towards our neighbours, our historical rôle which derives from our geographical position; it is our duty

to the best of our ability to isolate ('immuniser') one of the most sensitive points in the west, and probably of the world, in preventing our territory from serving as a starting-point or as a passage or pawn to one or other of the great countries which can, and have so often, entered into conflict. We lessen by that action in a considerable measure the possibilities and the risks of conflict. Such is the service which all our neighbours have a right to expect from us. It is our duty to protect them reciprocally, the ones from the others all round us, and with that in view it is necessary that we should be strong in every way, strong enough to be able to snatch away in advance from our neighbours every advantage which they could take by a violation of our frontiers, and thus, here we are brought back to the military problem. To follow the policy of independence which we have, and in order that this policy should have the results which we desire, that is to say, peace at home as an element of peace in the west and in the world, it is necessary that we make every effort in our power; and that is the reason why it is necessary for us to assure for ourselves a cover for our mobilisation, and that is the reason why it is necessary that our army should have resources in men and in riches commensurate with the importance of our country. But at the same time that is the reason why it is necessary for our military organisation to correspond with the conception of our foreign policy, which I have just outlined. We require a military system which should not permanently be directed against anybody, nor tied up in a permanent fashion with the military conceptions of anyone else. That is the conception which is at the bottom of the draft Bill which we have submitted to you."

ANNEX C.

Mr. Eden to M. Corbin and to Baron de Cartier de Marchienne.

Your Excellency,

Foreign Office, April 1, 1936.

I HAVE the honour to hand herewith to your Excellency the letter contemplated in the Text of Proposals drawn up on the 19th March by the representatives of Belgium, France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Italy. Your Excellency will appreciate that the delivery of this letter in no way implies that in the view of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom the effort of conciliation referred to in this letter has failed. As you are aware, we have to-day received from the German Government certain proposals which we have communicated to your Government and to which we are giving our immediate consideration.

Meanwhile, His Majesty's Government are willing, in accordance with paragraph III of the Proposals, to instruct their General Staffs forthwith to enter into contact with the Belgian General Staffs, with a view to arranging the technical conditions in which the obligations referred to in that paragraph should be carried out in case of unprovoked aggression.

On behalf of His Majesty's Government I have the honour to state that it is understood that this contact between the General Staffs cannot give rise in respect of either Government to any political undertaking, nor to any obligation regarding the organisation of national defence. I shall be glad to have your Excellency's confirmation that this is likewise the understanding of your Government.

His Majesty's Government propose that the conversations between the General Staffs of the two countries, necessary for establishing the contacts in question, should be begun in London.

I am addressing a similar letter to the French Ambassador.

I have, &c.

ANTHONY EDEN.

ANNEX D.

Paragraph 3 of Article 16 of the Covenant.

THE Members of the League agree, further, that they will mutually support one another in the financial and economic measures which are taken under this Article, in order to minimise the loss and inconvenience resulting from the above measures, and that they will mutually support one another in resisting any special measures aimed at one of their number by the covenant-breaking State, and that they will take the necessary steps to afford passage through their territory to the forces of any of the Members of the League which are co-operating to protect the covenants of the League.
