

February 17, 1940
**The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Steinhardt) to
the Secretary of State**

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Summary:

Ambassador Steinhardt on rumors that the Soviet Union is planning to take control of Latvia and Estonia.

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[Received 7:35 p.m.]

185. I returned to Moscow today following 6 days in transit through Riga, Tallinn, Narva and Leningrad. As a result of my observations and conversations with well-informed persons during the past week I have gained the following impressions:

(1) While there are persistent rumors in Latvia and Estonia to the effect that the Soviet Government contemplates further control over those States, Wiley and I were assured by the Foreign Ministers of both countries that no important demands have recently been made of them by the Soviet Government and that they do not anticipate such demands. It was apparent to me nonetheless that Soviet influence in Latvia and Estonia is already very great, is steadily increasing, and that the Latvians and Estonians in general feel that the Soviet military forces which are everywhere in evidence, especially on the railways, constitute virtually an army of occupation.

(2) It is evident that the Swedish Government is actively engaged in the Baltic States in an endeavor to bring about action leading to the cessation of the Finnish-Soviet conflict. I believe that in these activities Sweden is at present acting independently of Germany and Estonia, both of which countries are likewise engaged in similar activities.

(3) There has been a decided improvement recently in conditions in Leningrad which I found to be far better than previous reports would indicate. Food conditions at the present time in that city do not appear to be worse than usual, transportation appears to be normal. I could detect no signs of tension or discontent. The shops appeared to be better stocked than those in Moscow. I saw no wounded or other signs of the war in progress but a few miles distant, aside from the blackout.

(4) On the journey from Tallinn to Leningrad, and especially after passing Narva, I observed large military concentrations which included abundant light field artillery and light and medium tanks, field kitchens, and troops of all categories including substantial bodies of ski troops. At one airfield near which the train stopped for some time, I observed abundant quantities of gasoline and approximately 30 large tri-motored bombers of modern design. I assume that these forces are being assembled in the neighborhood of Leningrad primarily as reserves for the offensive operations in progress on the Karelian Isthmus although it is possible that should the Gulf of Finland freeze to a degree that would make such an operation practicable they might be utilized in an attempt to outflank the Mannerheim positions.

(5) With respect to the policy of the Soviet Government toward the Finnish conflict all of the persons with whom I spoke confirmed my impression that the Soviet Government has thus far not been responsive to attempts to bring the conflict to an end through mediation or otherwise although it is generally felt that should the present offensive fail the Soviet Government might thereafter be willing to give consideration to a negotiated settlement provided virtually all of its terms could be met. I observed a general belief that in that event the Soviet Government might be inclined to accept mediation on the part of Germany, Estonia, Sweden or the United States, or at least avail itself of the good offices of one of these countries. I am convinced, however, that until the Soviet Government has satisfied itself that it cannot achieve a decisive military victory it will not entertain any proposals for mediation and that as a result of its lack of success thus far it is now devoting much more serious attention to the technical measures necessary for the prosecution of the war and is now attaining a greater degree of proficiency in organization and attack than heretofore.

(6) I was particularly impressed by the noticeably bad condition of the Soviet railway system, especially by the deteriorated condition of the rolling stock which is in a far worse state than the roadbed. There appear a grave shortage of locomotives and in addition to this capacity, a decidedly inefficient organization inasmuch as reserved

thousands of freight cars lying idle on sidings. Judging by the chalked date markings on the sides and their appearance, most of these cars had been on such sidings for several weeks. The speed of the passenger trains on which I traveled was only a few miles an hour. The trip from Moscow to Riga required 42 hours. The second night the train was unlighted, without sleeping accommodations, and without food or even water throughout the whole trip

Steinhardt