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Date- 11-13-63

NAVY DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
WASHINGTON

Signature- *Carl T. Spicer*

24 March 1938

My dear Mr. President:

In view of their possible bearing on current discussions of the Escalation Clause of the 1936 Treaty, I quote herewith for your information some inferences drawn by one of our officers from a recent conversation in Rome with a particularly well informed Italian Naval Officer of high rank and close contact with the Foreign Office:

"(1) He expressed the opinion that the Japanese are undoubtedly building, or intend to build, cruisers in excess of the Treaty Limits.

"(2) Italy desires, in the interests of good International Relations, particularly with the United States, to adhere to Treaty Limits, as evidenced by her action with regard to the ROMA and IMPERO. However, if Italy departs from Treaty Limits, I am of the opinion it will be in the cruiser class, which matter is apparently now under consideration, with a keen interest indicated regarding our policy.

"(3) He expressed the opinion that undoubtedly Japan is building battleships in excess of Treaty Limits and that he thought they might be about 2000 tons less than the 46,000 tons he had previously indicated.

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"(4) Among a well informed group of Italian Naval Officers there is a strong desire for a Fleet Air Arm, but they see no hope of accomplishing it in the near future. They recognize it as a great weakness of the Italian Fleet, particularly outside the Mediterranean, and the further the Fleet advances from metropolitan Italy.

"(5) Scepticism regarding Japan's ability to design radically new vessels, particularly with 18" guns.

"(6) Majority Italian opinion was stated "to agree with British opinion that 16" guns are preferable to 18" guns which would have insufficient advantage over guns of smaller calibre which could maintain the same volume of fire"; and 18" guns present difficult problems of various kinds.

"(7) Great relief at the hopeful prospects of a settlement with Britain and the earnest sincere desire of the Duce for Peace. Strong emphasis on the necessity to Italy for peace due to her critical stringent financial position.

"(8) Recognition that neither Japan nor Italy can stand the financial pace of a Naval Expansion Race.

"(9) The necessity for a rapprochement in Italian-French relations which was stated to be an absolute necessity to supplement any Italo-British agreement that might be achieved. Difficulties mentioned were French desires for alliances with Czechoslovakia, Little Entente and Soviet Russia.

"I gathered the impression that U.S. Naval Strategy in the Pacific is a subject of keen interest, and the limitations of the Panama Canal regarding the size of battleships we could successfully

~~Confidential~~ appeared important to them. Some eagerness for accurate information on this point was evidenced.

"Looking back over my conversations with this officer during the past 20 months, his failure during today's conversation to deny in any form or degree the existence of any kind of commitments on the part of Italy under the Anti-Comintern Pact seems significant. The increasing delicacy and reticence in discussions of this subject arouse definite suspicions. I commented that the lack of assurance on this point from an Italian source was in marked contrast to our Chief of Naval Operations' denial of any existing written or verbal understanding with Britain and France.

"Another point which has not escaped the Italian Ministry of Marine is the marked superiority that would accrue to the United States if our Navy decided now to construct cruisers of tonnage in excess of the Treaty Limits, in the case of those cruisers authorized under the regular 1939 and the President's Special Supplementary Program. Such a decision would unquestionably exert a tremendous influence on Italy. He commented upon the timely opportunity afforded us in this respect with the new Vinson **Bill** Program.

"If the Italian Navy should have any opportunity to influence Japan's cruiser design, it is my opinion that they will advocate a type of very fast heavily gunned ship, such as a 35 knot vessel with sufficient protection against air bombs and torpedoes - perhaps a medium sized battle cruiser. Our lack of at least 30 knot heavy vessels impresses the Italians as a great weakness. In today's conversation it was admitted that Japanese cruisers of between

~~Italy or America?~~

16,000 and 20,000 tons, with 35 knots and heavier guns would be as much superior to the Treaty Cruisers as 40,000 to 46,000 ton battleships would be to 35,000 ton Treaty battleships. The definite opinion was expressed that Japan would build some such vessels.

"He very subtly inferred a lack of Italian knowledge regarding the new Japanese Building Program, which only served to strengthen my opinion that the Italian Ministry of Marine is well informed regarding the Japanese Program."

Most respectfully,

*William D. Leahy*

The President,  
The White House.

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EOD 100.5200.8 (9/27/88)

Date- *11-13-63*

Signature- *Carl S. Spicer*