1-19-1910

Letter From Francis Mairs Huntington-Wilson to Elbert F. Baldwin, January 19, 1910

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January 19, 1910.

Dear Mr. Baldwin:

The Secretary has discussed with me your letter of the 11th instant and has allowed me to undertake to send you a few lines on the subject of the "open door" policy and the neutralization plan. I wish we could have met when you were in Washington lately, for this subject is so broad in its ramifications and has such an interesting historical setting that a long discussion would be a far better way to make it clear to you. The subject is subtle in a way, but yet, like most large ideas, beautifully simple.

From a memorandum which you enclosed I am sorry to see that the OUTLOOK has not been following diplomacy in China very closely the last ten years. This fact would tempt one to write at great length, but of course the salient facts are quite generally known.

You remember the picturesque incident of Captain Mouravieff's first crossing the Amur river as a Russian expansionist. Due to the Chinese protest he was recalled and degraded, and at the same time saluted with an Imperial kiss as the pioneer of Russian Imperialism in the Far East.

The result of Mouravieff's attempt was the cession to Russia of the north bank of the Amur, in 1858, and of all the region east of the Ussuri as far south as the Tumen river, in 1860. The tendency to territorial aggression at
at the expense of China began even earlier than this; however; you will recall that Portugal obtained Macao in 1586, and Great Britain, Hongkong, in 1842. In more recent times we have seen China suffer the loss of Korea, the Coree, Tongking, and Formosa, together with large portions of Turkistan, and grant the lease of Kowloon, the Laotung, Kiaochou, Weihaiwei, and Kuangchouwau.

This brings us down to the period of "spheres of influence", when Germany was found claiming special interest in Chantung; Japan in Fukien; Great Britain a preponderance in the Yangtze Valley and a portion of Kwangtung; France in Kwangtung, Kiangsi, Yunnan, and Szechuan; Russia carrying things with a high hand throughout Manchuria; and a diplomatic duel being conducted between Russia and Great Britain in the region of Tibet.

It does not take much imagination to see that a weak China and the policy of "spheres of influence" led straight toward partition. So clearly was this recognised that to the Chinese it became known as the "slicing the melon" policy, and was the immediate cause of the Boxer uprising.

In 1899 Secretary Hay obtained from the Powers concerned a declaration assuring respect for vested interests within the so-called spheres and guarantying equality of treatment in the matter of duties levied. During the progress of the Boxer trouble and immediately thereafter a further declaration was obtained from the Powers, concurring in Mr. Hay's statement of the policy of the "open door"
which he expressed as follows:

"The policy of the Government of the United States is to seek a solution which may bring about permanent safety and peace to China, preserve China's territorial and administrative entity, protect all rights guaranteed to friendly powers by treaty and international law, and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire."

Since 1900 the efforts of the United States, so far as China is concerned, have been consistently directed toward the realization of the aims set forth in the above statement, and the present administration yields none in its devotion to the principles therein enunciated.

Japan's early and artistic steps in the development of her policy of "protection, guidance, and control" in Korea brought her to feel that Russia's then position in Manchuria menaced the frontier which she hoped ultimately to make her own, that is the northern border of Korea. Hence the Russo-Japanese war, whereby Manchuria was to be saved to the open door policy. This motive indeed was largely pleaded as a bid for Chinese gratitude, and, during the war, for American sympathy.

Since the war we find Russia trying to assert, during the two or three years, political rights along her Manchurian railway in derogation of China's sovereignty and of the treaties of third Powers, based upon the railway concession of 1896 granted for business purposes to a private company. The concession, indeed, under which the Japanese railway from Kwangchentzu to Port Arthur and Dalny was built,
was part of the whole railway concession to Russia. The transfer of the Japanese portion was, as you know, made by the Portsmouth Treaty, which could only be carried out by Chinese acquiescence, which was given in the Peking convention of December, 1905. The importance of this any question is evident, since any political privileges countenanced on the part of Russia in the north would be a precedent similar action by Japan in the south, and in this way the whole zone of these railways might become fields of special Russian and Japanese exploitation, where would be built up zones of political interest in pursuance of a most flagrant type of the dangerous "spheres of influence" policy.

Of course history is full of pious frauds which by prescription have become established and recognized. For example, England in Egypt, France in Madagascar, England in Zanzibar, England in South Africa, Japan in Korea, etc., etc. Query: Is the policy of the open door to take rank in precisely the same category?

If you care to know my views of the three phases of American diplomacy in regard to the open door, I might illustrate it in this way: Mr. Hay performed a tremendous service; he was the first to cry "fire" as a caveat; then followed a long period when all the world suspected there was a fire; reiterated cries of "fire" were in danger of becoming tedious. Confronted by a supposed fire, one must
must either let it burn or bring water; Secretary Knox proposes to fetch water.

That Secretary Knox's "proposal with regard to Chinese railroads" is "consonant with the open door policy" can not be doubted. It aims to give China the possession of her railways by loans for their purchase or construction, which loans are to be made jointly by capitalists of nationalities whose governments are committed to the Hay policy, thus replacing the official interests of single Powers by the common interests of all Powers, including China.

It is impossible not to see that arrangements like the Hu-Kuang loan, where Great Britain, France, Germany, and the United States join in acquiring an interest in a great railway system in China, such interest including the possible hypothecation of Chinese revenues, is an arrangement in direct opposition to the dangerous principle of "spheres of influence". Its commercial advantages in the supplying of railway materials, etc., and its general political advantages in increasing prestige are too obvious to touch upon.

The Manchurian neutralization plan is an application of the same principle in a case of more urgent need and upon a vast scale. If accepted in its entirety it will substitute real for nominal Chinese sovereignty in those
provinces, and if accepted in part only will ensure the neutrality of the region concerned.

It seems to me that any thoughtful person who is also well informed will see at once that it is a splendid conception and that its proposal as a practical policy is absolutely certain to have an excellent diplomatic effect, whether it be actually adopted wholly or in part, or not at all.

Since certain revenues are to be pledged in security for the Hu-Kwang loan, the participation of the United States in that loan will ensure to the United States the right to advise and assist China in any revision of her fiscal and financial system, and this matter is regarded by this Government as one of pressing necessity.

The statement in your memorandum that "in commercial and financial affairs in China, China should be allowed to make her own untrammeled decisions" seems to imply that pressure is being brought to bear to compel China to make a loan which she does not desire. Nothing could be more mistaken. You must be aware that China has voluntarily entered into an agreement with certain British and American capitalists to borrow funds for the construction of a great railway from Chinchou to Aigun. No policy really preservative of China's interests can be carried out without not
not only China's acquiescence but China's assistance as well. The converse is equally evident, that China in her present condition can not advance her interests or protect her future without the sincere support of friendly Powers.

I can hardly believe that you mean that China shall be let entirely alone and no attempt be made to advise her as to the best method to be employed for the realization of her reform programme. In these days the interests of one nation are intertwined with those of all others that the financial recklessness or heresy of one becomes the peril of all. As well leave the slum to manage its own sanitation and thus infest the whole city, as to allow an unenlightented government, unopposed, to create or maintain a financial plague spot to the injury of the general interests.

One phase in your memorandum seems to indicate a confusion of the Hay policy of the open door with the Chinese reactionary movement known as the "rights recovery" policy whose shibboleth is "China for the Chinese". This movement on the part of uninformed Chinese youth has not sympathy with the aims of the Hay policy, save in so far as the latter seeks to preserve China's territorial and administrative entity. The "China for the Chinese" policy would get
get rid of all foreign investments in China and decline all advice and assistance from friendly Powers, and abrogate all her solemn treaty pledges. It demands that China be left to develop her own resources as she may please and commit any financial folly that may find favor, regardless of the effect upon international interests. Such an attempt to build up again the Great Wall of China would undo all that missionary effort, commercial intercourse, and diplomatic activity have been able to accomplish in the last century, and I am sure you have not sympathy with such aims.

Of course you do not allow yourself to be misled by "Shanghai bunders", nor by sensational and silly headlines. I am sure, myself, that Mr. Knox's Chinese policy is one of the finest things our diplomacy has seen and that it is appreciated by diplomats and statesmen the world over, and belittled only by a press which is uniformed, rather obtuse in diplomatic subtlety, insincere in its interest, and either malicious or blatantly sensational and aimless. I refer to the part of our own. As for the press of Japan, whose howls have been so industriously exploited in this country to the eclipse of more thoughtful consideration, the newspapers principally quoted are ones I know well. They are chiefly on pink paper and found in the hands of the Rickshaw men while waiting for a fare.
You will notice that none of the more reliable and independent papers, such as the JIJI, the NICHII NICHII, or the ASAHI, has as yet made any comments. The public men whose opinions have thus far been published are either in opposition to the Government or inclined to be sore for personal reasons.

I am, dear Mr. Baldwin,

Yours very sincerely,

Huntington Wilson.