

TODAY and TOMORROW

By WALTER LIPPMANN

That the Peace Can Still Be Saved

ALL observers seem to agree—and the various polls confirm what they report—that a great majority of the American people believe that a world war is in the making and that the chances are against the United States being able to stay out of it. If this opinion is true the prospect is indeed awful. For, whatever the outcome, another world war would be one of the great catastrophes of all time.

For my own part, I do not believe that war is inevitable, and, from what I can learn, this is the view of the men, here and abroad, who have the best means of knowing the actual situation in the world. If the governments, with the backing of public opinion, are sufficiently cool, clear-sighted, and resolute, the peace can still be saved by diplomacy.

The situation, though not at all desperate, is critical. To say that it is critical means more specifically that, according to the most reliable information available, there are now in progress negotiations of one sort and another among Germany, Italy, and Japan, and among factions within these nations, on which depends the decision whether there will or will not be war. Apparently, it is Japan which will cast the deciding vote.

The reason why Japan has the deciding vote is that Great Britain and France are now too strong in Europe to be attacked by Germany and Italy alone. Though London and Paris would suffer terrific damage in an attack from the air, they cannot be conquered from the air. Their naval superiority is overwhelmingly greater, and the French Army, standing behind the Maginot Line, is still the best army in the world. Backed up by the resources of the British Empire which the navy and the merchant marine can bring, the military power of France is probably sufficient to make a European war an impossible adventure.

That is where Japan comes into it. If Japan were to join in the attack by striking at Singapore, at the Dutch East Indies, and Australia, the British would have more enemies than they can handle. If they sent enough warships to the Far East to hold Japan, they would not have enough warships left in Europe to hold Italy and Germany; if they did not send warships to the Far East, and so let Japan get to Singapore, their Empire from India to Australia would collapse.

There is a faction in Japan, it would appear, which is greatly tempted to try for this enormous prize. If Japan ever gets to Singapore, she will control a great supply of oil and one of the main supplies of rubber as against the whole world. But there is another faction in Japan who regard the adventure as too dangerous because of the risk that the United States might enter such a war. Their argument is that Japan is not strong enough to take the chance of a war with the United States. For in such a war, the Japanese Navy would not dare to go to Singapore. And with Singapore held by the British and Panama held by the United States, Japan would be caught in a long-distance but tremendously effective blockade. Moreover, a war in which the United States took part would immediately redouble the resistance of the Chinese, and would probably cause even the Russians to move in the Far East.

As long as the Japanese think there is better than an even chance of the United States taking part in a world war, they are not likely to risk it. And if the Japanese will not risk it, there is a very good chance that Rome and Berlin will not risk it either.

situation would seem to be this: Italy-Germany vs. Britain-France, two against two = no war.

Italy-Germany-Japan vs. Britain-France, three against two = war very likely. Italy-Germany-Japan vs. Britain-France-United States-Russia = no war.

If these are the calculations which will decide the outcome, whether there is to be war or whether there is not to be war, then it is not hard to understand why the war party in Rome, Berlin, and Tokio is so angry at the American armament program, and at the President for helping the French and British to get airplanes, and the very best airplanes at that, and at the report that he regards it as a vital interest of the United States that the French Army and British Navy should not be destroyed.

The armament program has impressed the peace party in Japan; the help that is being given to the British and French, and also, one might add, the Netherlands, has strengthened the peace party, and there is such a thing in Germany and Italy. As a result, the chances of war are almost certainly much less than they were before the President began asking for more armaments and began helping the British and French to strengthen their defenses.

There are many things that the Administration has done which seem to me unwise or badly done. It ought to have gagged Secretary Ickes. It ought not, I believe, to keep the country divided in a partisan struggle by such provocative appointments as that of Mr. Amlie, or by such stubbornness as it displayed over the deficiency appropriation for W. P. A. It ought to put national unity ahead of all other considerations, and having done that itself, it could ask the Republicans and the rebellious Democrats to do likewise. That is fundamental to any policy.

On the question of "secrecy" the problem is more difficult. For if the President says publicly all that he knows about the dangers of the world situation, he may increase the dangers by arousing passion and he will surely be accused of inciting to war; if he tries to tell the Congress confidentially what he knows and fears, his confidences will be betrayed and he will be accused of having concealed purposes. He is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. But all things considered, he would do well to go to Congress and lay before it a full and frank exposition of what he is doing to avert a world war.

For that is undoubtedly what he is trying to do. He is making mistakes. But that he is trying to avert war, that this is his whole purpose, is, I think, absolutely indisputable. Helping France and Britain to buy arms can have no other purpose but to prevent war. Letting them get arms is not going to make them start a war. If we refuse to let them get arms, they would still have to fight if they were attacked. So letting them have arms is one way of making war less likely.

And since almost every one, as Mr. Hoover has made plain, thinks we could not stay out of a war, surely the prevention of war must be our object. Is there any one who wishes to go on record as believing that he does not care whether a world war breaks out? Is there any one who thinks the American government ought to do nothing to prevent it? Is there any one who wants to take the responsibility of saying that the United States should tell Japan, Germany, and Italy that, so far as we are concerned, they are perfectly safe if they decide to wage a world war? Whoever creates that impression abroad in these days of critical decisions is taking an awful responsibility upon himself.