

● PSF Burma

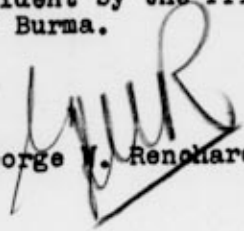
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

THE SECRETARY

December 18, 1941

MEMORANDUM FOR MISS TULLY

In accordance with Miss Brady's request, I am returning the letter addressed to the President by the Prime Minister of Burma.


George W. Renchard

Hotel Ambassador
Los Angeles, California
November 26, 1941

Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt
President of the United States
White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

I trust that you will pardon the liberty I am taking in writing you a letter just before my departure from the United States of America. Permit me first to thank you for your kindness and courtesy in granting me an interview on November 15th, at a time when you were hard pressed with matters of great moment.

2. You will remember that I mentioned at the interview the question of the application to my own country, Burma, of Article 3 of the historic Joint Declaration made by Mr. Churchill and yourself on the 14th of August 1941, a declaration which is now known as the Atlantic Charter and which is no less than a charter of liberties for the whole world. The article contains the following clear and unqualified declaration:-

"3. They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live and they wish to see their sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them."

We in Burma hailed the whole Joint Declaration with joy, and as Prime Minister I issued the following statement on behalf of the council of ministers and the people of Burma on the 17th of August 1941:-

"The Council of Ministers, in full knowledge of the aspiration of the people of Burma for national freedom and in full consciousness of their duty towards their country, see in the principles defined in the historic joint declaration made by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom a charter of liberties for all the peoples of the world.

They cannot help but conclude, from the universality of the expressions used in the declaration and from the clear and unequivocal language of it, that the principles declared thereby must have application to the people of Burma and that their acceptance by the Democracies must of necessity lead Burma to the attainment of

national freedom.

The Council, on behalf of the people of Burma, whom they represent, accordingly welcome the declaration with enthusiasm and affirm their adherence to the noble principles defined therein."

4. Mr. Churchill, however, made the following statement in the British Parliament on the 19th of September 1941, in respect of India and Burma:-

"Secondly, the joint declaration does not qualify in any way the various statements of policy which have been made from time to time about the development of the constitutional government of India and Burma or other parts of the British Empire. We are pledged by the Declaration of August 1940 to help India to obtain free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth of Nations, subject, of course, to the fulfillment of the obligations arising from our long connection with India and our responsibility to its many creeds, races and interests.

"Burma also is covered by our considered policy of establishing Burma's self-government and by measures already in progress.

"At the Atlantic meeting we had in mind primarily the sovereignty, self-government and national life of the States and nations of Europe now under the Nazi yoke and the principles which would govern any alterations in the territorial boundaries of these countries which may have to be made. That is quite a separate problem from the progressive evolution of self-governing institutions in the regions whose people owe allegiance to the British Crown. We have made declarations on these matters which are complete in themselves, free from ambiguity and related to the conditions and circumstances of the territories and peoples affected. They will be found entirely in harmony with the conception of freedom and justice which inspired the joint declaration."

5. Mr. Churchill's statement appears to qualify the generality of the language of Article 3 of the Joint Declaration, but he did not claim that his statement carried your consent, and

we in Burma have no doubt that it was made without that consent. We in Burma cannot believe that the generality of the terms of Article 3 should have been intended by you to be qualified and altered in this way, and we claim that the Joint Declaration promulgated to a waiting and anxious world, and received with acclamation cannot afterwards be declared to be not what it seems. The Joint Declaration must, we claim, be left to speak for itself and its opening words say clearly that on the principles then declared are based the hopes for a better future for the world. Burma claims, therefore, that she comes under the terms of Article 3, that the fact of her being a country in the British Empire has no relevance and that you and the country which you represent are pledged to respect the right of the people of Burma to choose the form of government under which they live. We desire to live under a constitution which puts us on an equality with the free peoples of the world.

6. It may at first sight appear to you that the issue in respect to Burma is an internal matter within the British Empire. But the Joint Declaration clearly envisages a world in which the use of force is to be abandoned and all nations will be allowed to choose the form of government under which they will live. Unless this noble idea prevails and becomes the established order, strong nations will continue to subjugate the weak and the process must go on till either the human race exterminates itself or one nation becomes the supreme nation to which all other nations must be subject. The only alternative to these is the universal and complete adoption by the world of the main principles of the Atlantic Charter, namely, that force must not be the arbiter between nations and that all peoples must be allowed to choose the form of government under which they will live. But you will readily appreciate that if permanent world peace is to be secured, this principle must be adopted without qualifications and without reservation. To leave out the subject peoples of the British Empire from the scope of this principle, or to modify this principle in its application to such peoples, is to leave a loophole through which war must inevitably come to the world again.

7. I appeal, therefore, on behalf of the people of my country to you, Sir, and to the great people of the United States of America that they should not regard the case of Burma as a domestic issue for the British Empire. The issue is a world issue and the world's faith in the genuineness of the war aims enunciated by you and Mr. Churchill will depend on the view you take on this point. I venture, therefore, not only

in the interest of my own country, but also of the whole world to urge on you the necessity of a further Joint Declaration by yourself and Mr. Churchill to make it clear that the principles defined in the Atlantic Charter are intended to be universal in their scope. That Burma happens to be within the British Empire is no reason why it should not come within the scope of a Joint Declaration. The right which you have pledged yourself to respect of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live is a right to which all peoples are entitled. It would be absurd if, in your aim to grant freedom to all peoples in the world, you exclude the peoples who were in the past forcibly brought into the British Empire. If force gives no moral right to nations now, force applied in the past lacks the same right. The British should grant freedom to the subject peoples within their own Empire first, if there is to be any truth in their professed war aim of restoring freedom to the peoples who have lost it in the present war. The only reason why the subject peoples of the British Empire are within the Empire is that at some stage or other in their history they were not able of themselves to defend themselves against a country with better arms than their own. It is for the same reason that many countries in Europe have now become subject to Nazi rule, and if the inability to defend themselves without help from friendly countries against all foreign aggression is to be the test of a country's right to govern itself, no country in Europe, including Britain herself, is qualified at present to stand this test.

8. You are doubtless fully aware of the strength of the opponents of the Democracies and the Joint Declaration was no doubt made to rally the rest of the world against the power of Hitler. There are many in the world who wish to go all out against Hitler in the interest of humanity, but it is essential that the war aims of the Democracies should embrace the whole of humanity within their scope. Any reservations and qualifications to these aims impair the faith that the world might otherwise have in them. This is the reason for the request I have made to you for a further Joint Declaration by Mr. Churchill and yourself that the Atlantic Charter applies to all peoples, without exception. It is necessary also that when the time comes for a re-settlement of the whole world on the basis of the Joint Declaration, the re-settlement should not be only for the countries of Europe. It is only if the principles in the Joint Declaration are universally applied that there will be a lasting peace for the whole world. I have no doubt that your great country will play a leading part in that re-settlement.

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It will be a truly great part if the United States secures the cooperation in that task of representatives of all nations and not only of the dominant nations. My country, I know, will accept no settlement which does not carry her free and willing consent and which was reached by a conference at which she was not represented.

Yours sincerely,

Saw. 26/11/41

(Mawng) Saw

Prime Minister of Burma.

Burma Folder

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

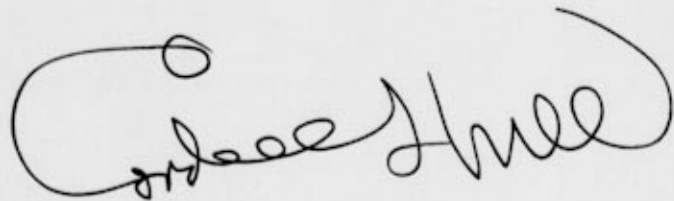
December 15, 1941

My dear Mr. President:

I refer to your inquiry of December 5, 1941 as to whether an answer is required to a letter dated November 26, 1941 appealing for a further joint declaration by you and Mr. Churchill to the effect that the "Atlantic Charter" applies to all peoples, without exception.

It may be recalled that, under the dyarchical system of government in Burma, matters pertaining to foreign relations are within the jurisdiction of the Governor of Burma, rather than that of the Burmese Ministry. It follows, therefore, that the Prime Minister of Burma lacks authority to treat with foreign governments upon his own initiative. For this reason it is considered that the letter of the Prime Minister does not require an answer.

Faithfully yours,



The President,

The White House.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

December 17, 1941.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

Re: Joint Defense of Burma.

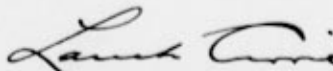
In answer to my inquiry re. plans for joint defense of Burma, General Magruder replied on December 14 that joint plans were being prepared and that a Chinese regiment was en route by foot. He stated that due to the difficulties of terrain and the other operations of the Japanese it was not believed that there would be any ground movements or attacks on Burma.

On December 16 he stated that "The Generalissimo has been very vehement in his criticism of the British, owing to the fact that no joint plan has been brought out for the defense of Burma. He has condemned the apparent haphazard methods that are being used, also the fact that all reinforcements have been piecemeal. He pointed out that while the British are hesitating it is possible that Burma might be lost."

A Military Intelligence Report from London stated that the Japanese had arrived at the Burmese border on Dec. 15th, on the route which I earlier indicated as the most likely one.

A cable received from Magruder today states that the British are now seriously concerned over Burma and have asked the Chinese for more troops. Chiang Kai-shek stated he would supply one corps.

There appears to be no way either here or there of securing the full measure of ABC coordination which our interests in that area so clearly demand. I have discussed with our Army people informally the possibility of our taking over a larger measure of responsibility for air operations in China, Burma and Singapore, under the command of a top-flight air officer. I feel so strongly that our vital interests are being jeopardized by British ineptitude and weakness in that area.


Lauchlin Currie