

1030.

Le délégué permanent [SDN] au secrétaire d'État aux Affaires extérieures
Permanent Delegate [L. of N.] to Secretary of State for External Affairs

DESPATCH 183

Geneva, August 31, 1939

Sir,

In my telegram No. 34 of 29th August¹ I reported that the present intention of the Secretary General in the event of war was to retain the Secretariat in Geneva as long as this proved to be possible. This represents a reversal of the decision reached during the acute tension of last spring, when arrangements had been made for the immediate removal of the Secretariat in the event of war from Geneva to Vichy in France, whence a haven would have been sought in neutral territory. So far as I can gather this change rises chiefly from the feeling that the likelihood of a violation of Swiss neutrality has diminished and that the presence of the Secretariat on Swiss territory in wartime now would probably not be used by Germany as a pretext for alleging that Switzerland was departing from her traditional neutrality. Since the spring also it has become still more evident that the political functions of the League are almost entirely suspended and that the present duties of the Secretariat are almost wholly concerned with economic and social questions.

Should the Swiss Government, however, find the presence of the Secretariat on Swiss soil to be embarrassing it would be moved immediately to another country. It would also be not unlikely that any meetings of the Council which might be held during war would be convened elsewhere.

I mentioned in my telegram that, while no decision had yet been taken, it was probable that in any event the session of the next Assembly would be postponed from 11th September. If the crisis ends in war it would be impossible to hold an Assembly in Geneva on that date. Probably all that would then be done would be an attempt to convene before the end of the year a skeleton Assembly for the purpose of adopting a budget for 1940 and performing other functions mainly of a routine character which would be necessary to keep League organisations in existence. If this crisis is passed without recourse to war, the probability is that international negotiations of the highest importance would still be in progress at the time the Assembly is due to convene; in such circumstances it would be desirable to await the conclusion of the negotiations before the Assembly met.

The Secretary-General is unlikely to approach Member States with a suggestion for the postponement of the Assembly until the situation is clearer, perhaps in the course of the next week. If postponement is agreed upon, the probability is that the Assembly would be put off to a date as late as possible

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