

## **The Pledge Plan**

Telegram from the Imperial Chancellor, von Bethmann-Hollweg, to the German Ambassador at Vienna, Tschirschky, July 28, 1914:

Telegram 174  
Berlin, July 28, 1914  
Urgent

The Austro-Hungarian government has distinctly informed Russia that it is not considering any territorial acquisitions in Serbia. This agrees with Your Excellency's report to the effect that neither the Austrian nor the Hungarian statesmen consider the increase of the Slavic element in the monarchy to be desirable. On the other hand, the Austro-Hungarian government has left us in the dark concerning its intentions, despite repeated interrogations. The reply of the Serbian government to the Austrian ultimatum, which has now been received, makes it clear that Serbia has agreed to the Austrian demands to so great an extent that, in case of a completely uncompromising attitude on the part of the Austro-Hungarian government, it will become necessary to reckon upon the gradual defection from its cause of public opinion throughout all Europe.

According to the statements of the Austrian General Staff, an active military movement against Serbia will not be possible before the 12th of August. As a result, the Imperial government is placed in the extraordinarily difficult position of being exposed in the meantime to the mediation and conference proposals of the other cabinets and if it continues to maintain its previous aloofness in the face of such proposals, it will incur the odium of having been responsible for a world war, even, finally, among the German people themselves. A successful war on three fronts cannot be commenced and carried on any such basis.

It is imperative that the responsibilities for the eventual extension of the war among those nations not originally immediately concerned should, under all circumstances, fall on Russia. At Mr. Sazonoff's last conversation with Count Pourtals, the Minister already conceded that Serbia would have to receive her "deserved lesson." At any rate the Minister was no longer so unconditionally opposed to the Austrian point of view as he had been earlier. From this fact it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the Russian government might even realize that, once the mobilization of the Austro-Hungarian Army had begun, the very honor of its arms demanded an invasion of Serbia. But it will be all the better able to compromise with this idea if the Vienna Cabinet repeats at Petersburg its distinct declaration that she is far from wishing to make any territorial acquisitions in Serbia, and that her military preparations are solely for the purpose of a temporary occupation of Belgrade and certain other localities on Serbian territory in order to force the Serbian government to the complete fulfillment of her demands, and for the creation of guarantees of future good behavior-- to which Austria-Hungary has an unquestionable claim after the experiences she has had with Serbia. An occupation like the German occupation of French territory after the Peace of Frankfort, for the purpose of securing compliance with the demands for war indemnity, is suggested. As soon as the Austrian

demands are complied with, evacuation would follow. Should the Russian government fail to recognize the justice of this point of view, it would have against it the public opinion of all Europe, which is now in the process of turning away from Austria. As a further result, the general diplomatic, and probably the military, situation would undergo material alteration in favor of Austria-Hungary and her allies.

Your Excellency will kindly discuss the matter along these lines thoroughly and impressively with Count Berchtold, and instigate an appropriate move at St. Petersburg. You will have to avoid very carefully giving rise to the impression that we wish to hold Austria back. The case is solely one of finding a way to realize Austria's desired aim, that of cutting the vital cord of the Greater-Serbia propaganda without at the same time bringing on a world war, and, if the latter cannot be avoided in the end, of improving the conditions under which we shall have to wage it, insofar as is possible.

Wire report.

BETHMANN-HOLLWEG