

from: Hans Trefousse, What Happened at Pearl Harbor,
(College and University Press, 1958).

INTRODUCTION:

By 1941, Japanese and American diplomats were engaged in tense (and secret) negotiations. The following documents show (A) The US State Department Advisor Stanley Hornbeck's response to a Japanese proposal that President Franklin D. Roosevelt meet with Prime Minister Konoye Fumimaro, & (B) the proposals each side made to avoid war. Note that the Japanese thought that the US note made war the only option!

MEMORANDUM BY THE ADVISER ON POLITICAL RELATIONS (HORNBECK)*

Foreign Relations, 1941, Far East, pp. 425-428.

[WASHINGTON,] September 5, 1941

The chief danger attendant upon the holding of a meeting between the President and the Japanese Prime Minister is that if such a meeting is held there must emanate from it an agreement. The only kind of an agreement that could possibly be arrived at would be an agreement in most general terms. Such an agreement would not (in the light of what we know of this

*Unsigned "Comment on the question of holding (at this time) a conference."

THE AMERICAN-JAPANESE CONVERSATIONS

country's attitude and policy and of what we are now given regarding Japan's attitude and policy) represent any real meeting of the minds of the two persons who could become parties to it, and still less would it represent a meeting of the minds of the people of the two countries thus committed by it. In entering into such an agreement neither of the parties to it would intend or expect that his country would, by the consummation of that agreement, be diverted from its present principles, objectives, policies or even procedures. Each of the parties would be motivated in large part by political *fears* and *hopes*; each would be playing for time and hoping for miracles to come; each would be expecting that a make-shift and make-delay agreement would be advantageous for his side; each would be expecting to tell his own people far less than the whole truth about the meeting and about the agreement.

For the Japanese Premier, most of this would be "all to the good." Not so, however, for the American President. The world is not expecting of Japan today any battle for peace, any support of high principles, any aid for countries resisting aggression: Japan is one of the three allied aggressor powers and Japan intends to remain in the Tripartite Alliance for a good while to come. The United States has proclaimed itself the "arsenal of democracy" in support of principles and in resistance to aggressor powers; the world expects of the United States that it will not compromise with any aggressor power and that, on the contrary, it will assist the countries which are being aggressed against by giving them aid (and comfort) and by withholding aid (and comfort) from aggressor powers.

The United States has done no injury to Japan or to the world. Japan has done injury to both the United States and to the world.

The holding by the President of the United States now of a rendezvous with the Premier of Japan would be, so far as the United States is concerned, a gesture born of lack of confidence in the present position (actual military capacity) of the United States. It would be utterly unlike the meeting between the President and the British Prime Minister. It would more nearly resemble meetings which were held between Mr. Chamberlain

and Mr. Hitler. Whatever might be said in some quarters of the "courage," the "vision" and the "nobility" of attempts to make and to maintain peace, this gesture would be construed and interpreted by, to and for the Japanese—and the Germans—as an indication of weakness and uncertainty on the part of the United States. And, it would give a terrific jolt to the Chinese and the Dutch and the Russians and even the British.

And then—the agreement—. It would not put a stop to Japanese aggression. It would not bring to an end Japan's effort to conquer China: it would on the contrary tend to facilitate that effort. It would not give the United States any *time* that we would not have in the absence of it. It would not afford us security. It might, if we relied on it as a factor in our defense, lead us faster and more surely toward war—not war with Germany alone but war with Germany *and* Japan, a war from which on our side the Chinese and the Russians might be missing.

For, if the United States makes an agreement with Japan, there would be no reason for us to assume with any confidence that the Chinese would continue to resist Japan or that the Soviet Union would not make an agreement with Japan. Then, were there such developments, the world line-up would be the United States and Great Britain (two only) against the Tripartite Alliance (Japan included)

The Chinese question is the central question now, and it will be that for a good while to come, in the problem of the Far East. That question cannot be disposed of without China's having a "say-so." And it cannot be disposed of between Japan and China without a military victory by Japan over China or a dissolution (which cannot be other than gradual) of Japan's military effort in and against China.

Whatever is necessary as a factual condition precedent for peace in western Europe is necessary, in broad terms of similarity, as a factual condition precedent for peace in eastern Asia.

To wean Japan away at this time—on paper or in appearance—from the Axis would be an achievement spectacular in aspect but of no substantial political or military value. For, Japan is not helping Germany except in a negative way (which she is

doing only because the United States overestimates Japan's capacity to injure us) and Japan will not be helping Germany in any positive way unless and until the United States goes to war with Germany (at which time, if and when, it is problematical what Japan would do).

From the point of view of United States interests: Conclusion of an agreement with Japan is not an urgent desideratum. We are not in great danger vis-a-vis Japan and Japan is not capable of doing us any great injury. Japan, involved and weakened as she is by the "Chinese Incident," does not possess military capacity sufficient to warrant an attack by her upon the United States with any reasonable expectation on her part or ours of her defeating us in war. Were Japan to attack us, we could with a wisely strategic use of less than one-half of our Navy maintain a sound defensive position while we prepared for an ultimate offensive.

The degree of "tension" between the United States and Japan is exaggerated. The facts of the situation that now exists are working real hardship to Japan (as a nation at war) but are not working any real hardship to the United States. This condition of "tension" can continue for an indefinite period without our suffering much. Were Japan to make war on us, she could interfere for a while with our procuring of tin and rubber. But, there is a low minimum of likelihood that Japan will make war on us for (a) there are easier wars that she might make nearer home and (b) she is already at war with China and making out none too well there, and (c) she is waiting for clear signs—which are not likely to come in the near future—that the Germans are winning against either the Soviet Union or Great Britain. (If, however, Japan should get an agreement with us, the chance of her attacking the Soviet Union would be substantially increased.) There is little for us to gain but much for Japan to gain should a conclusion now of an agreement between the two countries be consummated. We are not "in a hole" and we need no helping out. Japan is "in a hole," she needs helping out, and she is trying to get us to be her helper. (But at the same time she is neither willing nor able to give up her position in the Axis Alliance.) She is half whipped in

her war with China—and she hopes that, with the “lift” that conclusion of an agreement between her Premier and the President of the United States would give her, she will either be able to knock out China or be able to avoid being knocked out by China.

DRAFT PROPOSAL HANDED BY THE JAPANESE
AMBASSADOR (NOMURA) TO THE SECRETARY OF
OF STATE ON NOVEMBER 20, 1941

Foreign Relations, Japan, II, 755-756.

1. Both the Governments of Japan and the United States undertake not to make any armed advancement into any of the regions in South-eastern Asia and the Southern Pacific area excepting the part of French Indo-China where the Japanese troops are stationed at present.

2. The Japanese Government undertakes to withdraw its troops now stationed in French Indo-China upon either the restoration of peace between Japan and China or the establishment of an equitable peace in the Pacific area.

In the meantime the Government of Japan declares that it is prepared to remove its troops now stationed in the southern part of French Indo-China to the northern part of said territory upon the conclusion of the present arrangement which shall later be embodied in the final agreement.

3. The Government of Japan and the United States shall cooperate with a view to securing the acquisition of those goods and commodities which the two countries need in Netherlands East Indies.

4. The Governments of Japan and the United States mutually undertake to restore their commercial relations to those prevailing prior to the freezing of the assets.

The Government of the United States shall supply Japan a required quantity of oil.

5. The Government of the United States undertakes to refrain from such measures and actions as will be prejudicial to the endeavors for the restoration of general peace between Japan and China.

DOCUMENT HANDED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE
TO THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR (NOMURA)
ON NOVEMBER 26, 1941

Strictly Confidential,
Tentative and Without
Commitment.

WASHINGTON, November 26, 1941

OUTLINE OF PROPOSED BASIS FOR AGREEMENT
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN

SECTION I.

Draft Mutual Declaration of Policy

The Government of the United States and the Government of Japan both being solicitous for the peace of the Pacific affirm that their national policies are directed toward lasting and extensive peace throughout the Pacific area, that they have no territorial designs in that area, that they have no intention of threatening other countries or of using military force aggressively against any neighboring nation, and that, accordingly, in their national policies they will actively support and give practical application to the following fundamental principles upon which their relations with each other and with all other governments are based:

(1) The principle of inviolability of territorial integrity and sovereignty of each and all nations.

(2) The principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

(3) The principle of equality, including equality of commercial opportunity and treatment.

(4) The principle of reliance upon international cooperation and conciliation for the prevention and pacific settlements of controversies and for improvement of international conditions by peaceful methods and processes.

The Government of Japan and the Government of the United States have agreed that toward eliminating chronic political instability, preventing recurrent economic collapse, and providing a basis for peace, they will actively support and practically apply the following principles in their economic relations with each other and with other nations and peoples:

(1) The principle of non-discrimination in international commercial relations.

(2) The principle of international economic cooperation and abolition of extreme nationalism as expressed in excessive trade restrictions.

(3) The principle of non-discriminatory access by all nations to raw material supplies.

(4) The principle of full protection of the interests of consuming countries and populations as regards the operation of international commodity agreements.

(5) The principle of establishment of such institutions and arrangements of international finance as may lend aid to the essential enterprises and the continuous development of all countries and may permit payments through processes of trade consonant with the welfare of all countries.

SECTION II.

Steps To Be Taken by the Government of the United States and by the Government of Japan

The Government of the United States and the Government of Japan propose to take steps as follows:

1. The Government of the United States and the Government of Japan will endeavor to conclude a multilateral non-

aggression pact among the British Empire, China, Japan, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union, Thailand and the United States.

2. Both Governments will endeavor to conclude among the American, British, Chinese, Japanese, the Netherland and Thai Governments an agreement whereunder each of the Governments would pledge itself to respect the territorial integrity of French Indo-China and, in the event that there should develop a threat to the territorial integrity of Indo-China, to enter into immediate consultation with a view to taking such measures as may be deemed necessary and advisable to meet the threat in question. Such agreement would provide also that each of the governments party to the agreement would not seek or accept preferential treatment in its trade or economic relations with Indo-China and would use its influence to obtain for each of the signatories equality of treatment in trade and commerce with French Indo-China.

3. The Government of Japan will withdraw all military, naval, air and police forces from China and from Indo-China.

4. The Government of the United States and the Government of Japan will not support—militarily, politically, economically—any government or regime in China other than the National Government of the Republic of China with capital temporarily at Chungking.

5. Both Governments will give up all extraterritorial rights in China, including rights and interests in and with regard to international settlements and concessions, and rights under the Boxer Protocol of 1901.

Both Governments will endeavor to obtain the agreement of the British and other governments to give up extraterritorial rights in China, including rights in international settlements and in concessions and under the Boxer Protocol of 1901.

6. The Government of the United States and the Government of Japan will enter into negotiations for the conclusion between the United States and Japan of a trade agreement, based upon reciprocal most-favored-nation treatment and reduction of trade barriers by both countries, including an undertaking by the United States to bind raw silk on the free list.

7. The Government of the United States and the Government of Japan will, respectively, remove the freezing restrictions on Japanese funds in the United States and on American funds in Japan.

8. Both Governments will agree upon a plan for the stabilization of the dollar-yen rate, with the allocation of funds adequate for the purpose, half to be supplied by Japan and half by the United States.

9. Both Governments will agree that no agreement which either has concluded with any third power or powers shall be interpreted by it in such a way as to conflict with the fundamental purpose of this agreement, the establishment and preservation of peace throughout the Pacific area.

10. Both Governments will use their influence to cause other governments to adhere to and to give practical application to the basic political and economic principles set forth in this agreement.