

The Memoirs of

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78: Japan's Ultimatum

JAPAN'S LAST-WORD PROPOSAL, handed me by Ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu on November 20, in the nature of a temporary agreement or *modus vivendi*, was clearly unacceptable. In six points the Tokyo Government put conditions that would have assured Japan domination of the Pacific, placing us in serious danger for decades to come.

These were:

Japan and the United States to make no armed advance into any region in Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific area;

Japan to withdraw her troops from Indo-China when peace was restored between Japan and China or an equitable peace was established in the Pacific area;

Japan meantime to remove her troops from southern to northern Indo-China upon conclusion of the present agreement which would later be embodied in the final agreement;

Japan and the United States to cooperate toward acquiring goods and commodities that the two countries needed in the Netherlands East Indies.

Japan and the United States to restore their commercial relations to those prevailing prior to the freezing of assets, and the United States to supply Japan a required quantity of oil;

The United States to refrain from such measures and actions as would prejudice endeavors for the restoration of peace between Japan and China.

My associates and I subjected these points and their implications to minute study, but it required very little scrutiny to see that they were utterly unacceptable.

The commitments we should have to make were virtually a surrender. We on our part should have to supply Japan as much oil as she might require, suspend our freezing measures, and resume full commercial relations with Tokyo. We should have to discontinue aid to China and withdraw our moral and material support from the recognized Chinese Government of Chiang Kai-shek. We should have to help Japan obtain products of the Netherlands East Indies. We should have to cease augmenting our military forces in the western Pacific.

Japan, on her part, would still be free to continue her military operations in China, to attack the Soviet Union, and to keep her troops in northern Indo-China until peace was effected with China. There was no limit on the troops Japan could send into Indo-China. Her willingness to withdraw her troops from southern Indo-China to northern Indo-China was meaningless because those troops could return within a day or two. Japan thus clung to her vantage point in Indo-China which threatened countries to the south and vital trade routes.

The President and I could only conclude that agreeing to these proposals would mean condonement by the United States of Japan's past aggressions, assent to future courses of conquest by Japan, abandonment of the most essential principles of our foreign policy, betrayal of China and Russia, and acceptance of the role of silent partner aiding and abetting Japan in her effort to create a Japanese hegemony over the western Pacific and eastern Asia.

Acceptance of Japan's proposals would have placed her in a commanding position later to acquire control of the entire western Pacific area. It would have destroyed our chances of asserting and maintaining our rights and interests in the Pacific. It would have meant abject surrender of our position under intimidation. And, in final analysis, it would have meant a most serious threat to our national security.

Although Japan's proposals were of so preposterous a character that no responsible American official could ever have dreamed of accepting them, I felt I should not be too sharp in my reactions, and should avoid giving the Japanese any pretext to walk out of the conversations.

After Nomura read me Japan's proposals on November 20, I said I wanted to make a few comments but these were not directed specifically to the proposals, to which I would give sympathetic study. "Japan," I said, "has it in her power at any moment to put an end to the present situation by deciding upon an all-out peaceful course. At any moment Japan could bring to an end what she chooses to call encirclement. We should like to have Japan develop public opinion in favor of a peaceful course."

Kurusu said that, if we could alleviate the situation by accepting a proposal such as the Japanese Government had just made, it would help develop public opinion.

I asked the two Ambassadors what they thought would be the public reaction in the United States if we were to announce tomorrow that we had decided to discontinue aid to Great Britain. There was no reply. "In