

# Us japanese relations before pearl harbor assignment

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Introduction Life, like war, compares to the game of chess. There are two sides, and they take turn moving their pieces in play. There is always a strategy for the final goal, victory, or the game could end in a stalemate. An endless possibility of moves exists for each player, keeping in mind the possible future actions of the opponent. This makes the game complex and difficult because each player does not know the intent, or exact move of the opponent. Each player must rely on instinct and judgment of their opponent to estimate the next action of the opponent.

One must also account for the losses of pieces and the sacrifices needed in order to achieve victory. A game of chess between the United States and Japan started in July 1937 and ended in December 1941. On December 7, 1941 the Japanese Navy attacked the United States airbase at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This came as a surprise to the American government that had previously had a series of extensive peace talks with Japanese diplomats. Many have asked why the Japanese went to war against the United States and why the United States government “provoked” the attack.

Diplomats from each government tried to attain peace, after a string of Japanese aggressions in China during July 1937. Among other policy makers, principally three Americans lead the peace talks, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Secretary of the State Cordell Hull, and Ambassador to Japan Joseph Grew. Peace talks transpired between Washington and Tokyo throughout the four years. The inability to compromise on peace agreements and the implementations of economic embargoes culminated in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

To comprehend how and why the two countries went to war, one must start in 1937 when the Japanese Army invaded China and to closely look at the US-Japanese/ Sino-Japanese relations thereafter. In July 1937, by seizing the Marco Polo Bridge near Peiping, Japan sparked a large-scale invasion of China. Joseph Grew tried to influence an upholding of peace between Japan and China. <sup>1</sup> In the same month, Japanese Ambassador Saito and the Counselor of the Chinese Embassy talked with Secretary of State Cordell Hull in Washington to ensure that further hostilities between Japan and China would not happen. The American embassy in Tokyo sent the opinion of President Roosevelt to Japanese officials, asking for a ceasing of militant actions against China. Neither Japan nor China legally declared war on each other; nonetheless, the Japanese would not cease their aggressive actions causing further diplomatic struggles with the American Government. On October 5, 1937 President Roosevelt gave his “ quarantine” speech in Chicago. Roosevelt observed a developing lawless world, and saw other aggressive nations seriously threatening the peace loving countries like the United States.

Roosevelt expressed that America does not want war, that America hates war, and wishes to retain peace. He declared that the epidemic of world lawlessness has spread. When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of disease. <sup>3</sup> President Roosevelt did not specifically mention Japan, but implied the aggressive behaviors of Italy in Ethiopia, Germany in Spain, and Japan in China.

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On December 12 of the same year, Japanese aircraft bombed the U. S. S. Panay. The diplomatic events that followed furthered the idea of peace, but resulted in economic embargos. The incident occurred twenty miles up the Yangtze River from Nanking, China, the bombs sank the American gunboat while also destroying three Standard Oil Company tankers. The Japanese pilots had clearly seen the American flags on the vessels, but did not wait for orders.

Then the pilots claimed to think that the Americans were aiding Chinese military forces and transporting weapons for the Chinese. <sup>4</sup> Although this incident resolved two weeks after the attack, with a full Japanese apology and indemnities to the victims' families, this attack on Americans civilians was the first of multiple attacks on civilians in China. The United States would not tolerate such actions, yet had to strategically deal with in order not to confront Japan and start a war. By 1938, Japanese peace with China appeared unlikely. Yet the hope for peace still remained. In his journal entry on February 10, 1938 Grew writes: ...nevertheless the future outlook for further dangerous incidents was anything but serene. On the one hand, the ability of the Tokyo Government to control the action of the Japanese forces in China in jeopardizing American life, interests, and property is negative. On the other hand, I cannot conceive that with all our pacifist tendencies and longing for peace the patience of our people under cumulative insult is inexhaustible. <sup>6</sup>

This certainly strained the idea of peace with Japan. America stood to its policy of being a good neighbor to both China and Japan, however such

deliberate actions could not go unnoticed, and a cautious action must be taken. The Americans responded with a moral embargo on certain types of airplanes to Japan in July of 1938. 7 During Japan's "war" with China the number of American made airplanes sent to Japan increased until July 1938. Before the Japanese invasion of China the United States only sold about a dozen planes annually to Japan.

This totaled to two million dollars including the spare parts. However, in 1938 the number of planes exported increased to 66. Incorporating the 56 unmounted engines and accessories as well, the exports brought in eleven million dollars. 8 Since the incident between Japan and China was not legally a war the President could not legally embargo such items. Rather, the State Department told the press that the United States would "frown upon" any selling of planes that could bomb civilian populations. 48 airplane manufacturers were contacted by the Office of Arms and Munitions Control and were told that only with "great regret" would and export licenses be issued. This gesture proved to be 95 percent effective with only two planes sold to Japan in 1939. 9 While this moral embargo did not cripple Japan's number of aircraft, it meant that they could not buy planes from the United States. Japan continued to buy other types of exports from the United States to fuel their war.

On July 26, 1939 Cordell Hull addressed a note to the Japanese Ambassador Horinouchi giving Japan a formal six-month notice of the United States' desire to terminate the commercial treaty of 1911, which would take effect on January 26, 1940. 10 The abrogation of the 1911 commercial treaty

intended to invoke future legal rather than moral embargos on airplanes and war materials essential to Japan's conflict with China. During those six months, President Roosevelt authorized two moral embargos.

One of them, an embargo on the export of plans, plants, manufacturing rights, or technical information required to produce high-quality aviation gasoline. It did not specifically mention Japan; however, it applied to them because of their interest of purchasing plans and specifications for a high-octane gasoline plant. The Japanese purchased these from an American oil company in order to build a facility in Japan. The other embargo, two and a half weeks earlier, prohibited the export of any materials used in airplane manufacturing to countries engaged in bombing civilian populations.

This stopped exported goods getting to Japan because of the continuance of bombings of Chinese civilians and American missionary establishments in China. <sup>11</sup> Other embargos as well placed Japan at a disadvantage for their growing war with China. America placed a legal embargo on machine tool exports, signed July 1940. This did not only pertain to Japan but to all countries because of the conservation of machinery in order to fuel the United States' growing rearmament program. However, in 1939 machine tools consisted of 10.6 percent of the total American exports to Japan.

In 1937 when the war broke out, the exports of power driven metal working machinery totaled 11.9 million dollars. Three times more than the year before, and half as much as exported in 1939. This hindered Japan's industrial expansion and rearmament program especially because of their war with China. <sup>12</sup> The embargos that followed would prove to be much

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more detrimental to Japanese interests. In July, 1941 President Roosevelt authorized an executive order to freeze Japanese funds in America, which virtually ended trade between the two.

This included the oil supplies that were vital to Japans military. Japan imported approximately four-fifths of their oil from the United States and with trade ceasing it left Japan with a year and a half of reserves. <sup>13</sup> This oil embargo had been talked about for years with heavy opposition by both Grew and Hull. They both believed that cutting off Japanese oil supplies would result in an attack, most probably being in the Dutch East Indies in order to gain their oil. <sup>14</sup> Rather this embargo of oil proved to be the straw that broke the camels back.

The ceasing of oil supplies to Japan directly resulted in the planning and attacks on Pearl Harbor. However, not all hope was lost; the Americans could still reach an agreement of peace and resume such oil supplies to Japan given a few conditions. On November 20, 1941 Japanese Ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu handed Cordell Hull Japan's last word proposal. This gave the portrayal as an ultimatum to the United States government, specifically Hull, who notes that their temporary agreement was clearly unacceptable. <sup>15</sup> This proposal contained six points.

They 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. 16 Nomura and Kurusu were told by their Government in Japan to politely ask the Americans to stay out of Japan's business unless they met these conditions. Hinton 354) The problems Cordell Hull had with these conditions were that the United States had interest in both business with both Japan and China, so restoring their peace was a definite priority. Also by restoring the selling of oil to Japan would only fuel their war with China and the aggressions against Americans in China. Since 1939, the Japanese Government did not recognize the national government under rule by Chiang Kai-shek and this presented a problem to American interests in China. It took Hull six days to Secretary Hull issued to Japanese officials in Washington the ten-point offer on November 26, 1941.

Later known as the Hull Note, the ten-point offer responded to the Japanese proposals given on November 20. The ten proposals in which Hull handed to Ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu embraced that: A multilateral nonaggression pact among the Governments principally concerned in the Pacific; An agreement among the principally interested Governments to



respect the territorial integrity of Indo-China and equality of economic opportunity therein; No support of any Government in China other than the National Government (Chiang Kai-shek); Relinquishment of extraterritorial rights in China;

A trade agreement between the United States and Japan on liberal lines; Removal of freezing measures; Stabilization of the dollar-yen rate; An agreement not to interpret any agreement which either country had concluded with any third Power or Powers in such a way as to conflict with the fundamental purpose of the proposed basic accord (this had reference to the Tripartite Pact); The United States and Japan to use their influence to cause other Governments to accept and apply the principles set forth in our proposed agreement; Japan shall withdraw her armed forces from China and Indo-China. 7 The Japanese Ambassadors did not think that their Government would accept these conditions; they also viewed it as an ultimatum, especially due in part to the withdrawal of troops from China and support of Chiang Kai-shek. While the two final peace propositions had some obvious similarities as the restoration of trade between Japan and the United States, the differences in the two propositions proved that neither side would "yield an inch." This served as the end of diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States before Pearl Harbor.

However it would not be the last time Cordell Hull spoke with the Japanese Ambassadors. Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 211-215. 2 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. 1, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 534-535. 3 Robert Dallek,

Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy 1932-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 148. 4 Akira Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*. (New York: Longman, 1987), 48-50. 5 Iriye, 51. 6 Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan*, 245. Julius Pratt, *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, Vol. XII part 2. (New York: Cooper Square, 1964), 452. 8 Edward S. Miller, *Bankrupting the Enemy: the U. S. Financial Siege of Japan Before Pear Harbor*. (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 77. 9 Miller, 78. 10 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. 1, 637. 11 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. 1, 729. 12 Miriam S. Farley, "U. S. Tool Embargo Hits Japan's Armament Program" *Far Eastern Survey* 9 no 15 (July 17, 1940): 177-178. 3 Irvine H. Anderson, Jr. "The 1941 De Facto Embargo on Oil to Japan: A Bureaucratic Reflex" *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 44 no 2 (May, 1975): 201-202. 14 James H. Herzog, "Influence of the United States Navy in the Embargo of Oil to Japan, 1940-1941" *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 35 no 3 (August, 1966): 318. 15 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. 2, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 1069. 16 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. 2, 1069. 17 Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. 2, 1083.