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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

August 17, 1941

Subject: United States-Japanese Relations

Participants: The President, Secretary of State Hull and the Japanese Ambassador, Admiral Kichisaburo Nomura.

The Ambassador of Japan called to see the President at the latter's request. Following some few exchanges of preliminary remarks, the President then became serious and proceeded to refer to the strained relations between our two countries. He referred to the Ambassador's visit to me and the latter's request for a re-opening of the conversations between our two Governments. The President commented briefly on the policies and principles that this Government has been standing for in its relations with Japan, and he made some contrast to Japan's opposite course of conquest by force, et cetera. He concluded by saying that our attitude of opposition to Japan's course has been made well known, and that the next move is now up to Japan. The President inquired of the Ambassador if he had anything in mind to say in connection with the situation. Thereupon the Ambassador drew out of his pocket an instruction which he said was from his Government, in which the Japanese Government set forth some generalities and asserted very earnestly that it desired to see peaceful relations preserved between our two countries; that

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Prince Konoye feels so seriously and so earnestly about preserving such relations that he would be disposed to meet the President midway, geographically speaking, between our two countries and sit down together and talk the matter out in a peaceful spirit.

The President thereupon said that this Government should really bring the matters between the two Governments literally up to date and that he would, therefore, offer certain observations about the position of this Government; he added that he regretted the necessity of so doing but that he had no other recourse. The President said he had dictated what he was about to say and that he would read it to the Ambassador and then hand him the written instrument containing the oral conversation.

This the President proceeded to do as follows:

"During past months the Governments of the United States and of Japan, through the Secretary of State and the Japanese Ambassador in Washington, have engaged in protracted conversations directed toward exploring the possibility of reaching a sound basis for negotiations between the two countries relative to the maintenance of peace with order and justice in the Pacific. The principles and policies which were under discussion in these conversations precluded pursuit by either Government of objectives of expansion by force or by threat of force.

"On July 24 last the President of the United States informed the Japanese Government through the Japanese Ambassador in Washington that he was willing to suggest to the Governments of Great Britain, of the Netherlands and of China that they make a binding and solemn declaration that they had no aggressive intentions with regard to Indo-China and that they would agree that the markets and raw materials of Indochina should be available to all Powers on equal terms. The President stated further that he would be willing to suggest to the Powers mentioned that they undertake this declaration, in which the United States would be willing to join, upon the understanding that the Government of Japan would be disposed to make a similar declaration and would be further disposed to withdraw its military and naval forces from Indochina.

"Notwithstanding these efforts, the Government of Japan has continued its military activities and its disposals of armed forces at various points in the Far East and has occupied Indochina with its military, air and naval forces.

"The Government of the United States is in full sympathy with the desire expressed by the Japanese Government that there be provided a fresh basis for amicable and mutually profitable relations between our two countries. This Government's patience in seeking an acceptable basis for such an understanding has been demonstrated time and again during recent years and especially during recent months. This Government feels at the present stage that nothing short of the most complete candor on its part, in the light of evidence and indications which come to it from many sources, will at this moment tend to further the objectives sought.

"Such being the case, this Government now finds it necessary to say to the Government of Japan that if the Japanese Government takes any further steps in pursuance of a policy or program of military domination by force or threat of force of neighboring countries, the Government of the United States will be compelled to take immediately any and all steps which it may deem necessary toward safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the United States and American nationals and toward insuring the safety and security of the United States."

The President, after some little delay in the conversation so as to set apart the first statement which he read to the Ambassador, then proceeded to turn to the Ambassador's request to the Secretary of State and to himself for a resumption of the conversations. The President made further references to Japan's opposing course of conquest by force and bitter denunciation of this country by the Japanese Government-controlled press and then coming to the request for a reopening of the conversations he repeated our former statements to the Japanese Government that, of course, we could not think of reopening the conversations if the Japanese Government is to continue its present movement of force and conquest supported by its bitter press campaign against this country.

Thereupon the President proceeded to read to the Ambassador the following statement, which is self-explanatory:

"Reference is made to the question which the Japanese Ambassador raised on August 8 during a conversation with the Secretary of State whether it might not be possible for the responsible heads of the Japanese Government and the Government of the United States to meet with a view to discussing means whereby an adjustment in relations between the United States and Japan might be brought about. The thought of Prince Konoye and of the Japanese Government in offering this suggestion is appreciated.

"Reference is made also to the desire expressed by the Japanese Ambassador during a call on the Secretary of State on August 16 that there be resumed the informal conversations which had been in progress between the two Governments toward ascertaining whether there existed a basis for negotiations relative to a peaceful settlement covering the entire Pacific situation.

"When the Japanese Ambassador brought up these suggestions, the Secretary of State reminded the Ambassador that the Government of the United States had shown great patience and had been prepared to continue in that course of patience so long as the Japanese Government manifested a desire to follow courses of peace. It was pointed out to the Ambassador that while proceeding along this course this Government had received reports indicating clearly that the Japanese Government was adopting courses directly the opposite of those on which the recent conversations between the Ambassador and the Secretary of State had been predicated. It was pointed out also that the Japanese press was being constantly stimulated to speak of encirclement of Japan by the United States and was being officially inspired in ways calculated to inflame public opinion. The Secretary of State made it clear that he did not see how conversations between the two Governments could usefully be pursued or proposals be discussed while Japanese official spokesmen and the Japanese press contended that the United States was endeavoring to encircle Japan and carried on a campaign against the United States.

"On two occasions officers of the Department of State, pursuant to instructions from the Secretary of State, called on the Japanese Ambassador to indicate concern over the reports that Japan intended to acquire by force or threat of force military and naval bases in French Indochina. Subsequently, on

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July 21 and July 23 the Acting Secretary of State raised with the Japanese Minister and with the Japanese Ambassador the question of Japan's intentions with regard to French Indochina and pointed out that the Government of the United States could only assume that the occupation by Japan of French Indochina or the acquisition of military and naval bases in that area constituted notice to the United States that Japan had taken by forceful means a step preparatory to embarking on further movements of conquest in the South Pacific area. The Acting Secretary pointed out further that this new move on Japan's part was prejudicial to the procurement by the United States of essential raw materials and to the peace of the Pacific, including the Philippine Islands.

"The Government of the United States accordingly had no alternative but to inform the Japanese Ambassador that, in the opinion of this Government, the measures then being taken by the Japanese Government had served to remove the basis for further conversations relative to a peaceful settlement in the Pacific area.

"Informal discussions between the Japanese Government and the Government of the United States directed toward ascertaining whether there existed a basis for negotiations relative to a peaceful settlement covering the entire Pacific situation would naturally envisage the working out of a progressive program attainable by peaceful methods. It goes without saying that no proposals or suggestions affecting the rights and privileges of either the United States or Japan would be considered except as they might be in conformity with the basic principles to which the United States has long been committed. The program envisaged in such informal discussions would involve the application in the entire Pacific area of the principle of equality of commercial opportunity and treatment. It would thus make possible access in all countries to raw materials and to all other essential commodities. Such a program would envisage cooperation by all nations of the Pacific on a voluntary and peaceful basis toward utilizing all available resources of capital, technical skill, and progressive economic leadership for the purpose of building up not only their own economies but also the economies of regions where productive capacity can be improved. The result would be to increase the purchasing power of the nations and peoples concerned, to raise standards of living, and to create conditions so conducive to the maintenance of peace. If such a program based upon peaceable and constructive principles were to be adopted for the Pacific and if thereafter any of the countries or areas within the Pacific were menaced, the policy of aiding nations resisting aggression would continue to be followed by this Government and this Government

would cooperate with other nations in extending assistance to any country threatened.

"Under such a program for the Pacific area Japan would, in the opinion of the Government of the United States, attain all the objectives which Japan affirms that it is seeking. This program would not enable any country to extend its military or political control over other peoples or to obtain economic rights of a definitely monopolistic or preferential character. In those cases where the production and distribution of essential commodities are vested in monopolies, the Government of the United States would expect to use its influence to see that all countries are given a fair share of the distribution of the products of such monopolies and at a fair price.

"If the Japanese Government is seeking what it affirms to be its objectives, the Government of the United States feels that the program above outlined is one that can be counted upon to assure Japan satisfaction of its economic needs and legitimate aspirations with much greater certainty than could any other program.

"In case the Japanese Government feels that Japan desires and is in position to suspend its expansionist activities, to readjust its position, and to embark upon a peaceful program for the Pacific along the lines of the program and principles to which the United States is committed, the Government of the United States would be prepared to consider resumption of the informal exploratory discussions which were interrupted in July and would be glad to endeavor to arrange a suitable time and place to exchange views. The Government of the United States, however, feels that, in view of the circumstances attending the interruption of the informal conversations between the two Governments, it would be helpful to both Governments, before undertaking a resumption of such conversations or proceeding with plans for a meeting, if the Japanese Government would be so good as to furnish a clearer statement that has yet been furnished as to its present attitude and plans, just as this Government has repeatedly outlined to the Japanese Government its attitude and plans."

The Ambassador received each paper in writing and said he would communicate with both to his Government. He reiterated from time to time that his Government was very desirous of preserving peaceful relations between the two countries and he took no issue with the President relative to the reasons set forth by this Government for discontinuing conversations with Japan.