

Exhibit 2638

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Def. Doc. #1504

From M. M. Litvinov's Diary

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION WITH SHIGEMITSU
OF AUGUST 7, 1938.

I said to Shigemitsu that I wanted to take advantage of his visit in order to express my surprise, that after he had proposed the cessation of military action and I had replied that if the Japanese troops ceased attack and fire from the Manchurian side, military action would cease also from our side, the Japanese troops continued artillery fire and attacks, which forced us to reply and even to bring the air-force into operation. Although the Japanese attacks were repulsed, the responsibility for the sacrifices falls on the Japanese Government.

Shigemitsu said that he was surprised at my statement. The Japanese Government on August 4th through him brought out the proposal for the cessation of military action and the regulation of the incident by diplomatic negotiations. But, in reply to this proposal -- said Shigemitsu -- you demanded the Japanese troops' withdrawal behind the line of the place which you consider yours. I was disappointed with such an irreconcilable statement. On the other hand, the Japanese troops on the spot have received solemn instructions from the Center not to go even one step beyond the boundary, as Japan understands it. In spite of this, the Soviet side brought aviation into operation. Such actions are the most dangerous ones, which hinder the regulation of the incident. Having violated the boundary of Manchukuo and Japan, the Soviet air-force bombed those undefended areas that bore no relation to the place of the incident, as a result of which there were wounded and killed. In spite of the fact that the Soviet side brought its air-force into operation, the Japanese side did not resort to using its air-force and is refraining in every way from offensive and provocative action limiting itself to defending the frontier. According to exact information received by me from the scene, after the last talk on August 4th at the place there occurred a heavy battle, which was a result of the Soviet troops attacking the Japanese defence line. This attack was carried on day and night. The results of this, said Shigemitsu, you are probably acquainted with. Therefore, for the military actions which have taken place since the last talk, the Japanese side can not assume the responsibility. Moreover, the actions of the Soviet troops do not correspond with the statement which you made to me last time to the effect that you were ready to solve the incident peacefully. In this connection, I must enter a protest against these actions of the Soviet troops. At the same time I state that my proposal for the cessation of military action and the regulation of the incident by peaceful means remains valid.

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To Shigemitsu's statement I replied as follows:

Of course, if one occupies the territory of another along a definite line and then defends it actively with all arms, then it will, of course, be possible to talk about a defence line. But the Japanese troops were defending not Manchurian territory, but Soviet territory against Soviet troops. This is a provocation and an attack. The Japanese Government has no grounds for a protest.

Only the Soviet Government can protest. But this is not worth arguing about. As for the proposals which the Ambassador made last time and repeated to-day, according to the latest information in my hand, the Japanese troops were forced to evacuate Soviet territory. If they stop firing on Soviet territory from the Manchurian side, the proposal for cessation of military action will be realized, because we have no reason to fire on Manchurian territory when there is no firing on our side from there. We think that it is impossible in this case to talk about a frontier incident, because artillery was put in operation by the Japanese side at the very beginning, and a border guard had no artillery. Therefore, we are dealing with an intention to occupy a part of Soviet territory by regular troops and to draw the U S S R into a war with Japan. I can only express my hope and desire that these intentions should not be repeated again.

Shigemitsu stated that the Japanese troops did not intend to invade even one foot of Soviet territory. But Japanese troops must defend every foot of Manchurian territory. Because of this the Japanese troops had to take necessary measures for the defence of Manchukuo territory against attacks from the Soviet side. Consequently, we are dealing only with the repulse of an attack. I agree that this is not worth arguing over. If I am not mistaken, I understood you to say that if the Japanese troops would not fire and would remain in the same position they are in to-day, the Soviet side would also stop firing and all other military action. I am asking about this because the Soviet side is at present using its air-force, tanks and all kinds of artillery, while the Japanese troops are refraining from using offensive types of arms. It is incomprehensible that the Soviet side should protest under these circumstances. You say that you have information to the effect that the Soviet troops have expelled Japanese units, but I can not believe it. At any rate, the question comes down to whether I understood correctly that if the Japanese side did not fire and the Japanese troops remained in the positions they occupied to-day, the Soviet side would also stop firing. The Japanese side is persistently trying to regulate the present incident. From the very beginning of the outbreak of the incident, the Japanese side has tried to regulate it on a reasonable basis. It is ridiculous to talk about there being intentions of drawing the U S S R into a war with Japan. I think that that the Soviet side is creating various misunderstandings in their relations with Japan.

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I told Shigemitsu that according to my information there were no longer any Japanese troops in Soviet territory. If that is so and if they will not try to violate our boundary again, and what our boundary is (I have already explained to the ambassador many times) and if there is no firing on our territory from the Manchurian side, the Soviet troops will also cease fire. On the contrary, if the Japanese troops again appear suddenly on our territory and if the firing from the Manchurian side is continued, our troops will not be able to cease military actions either. Such is our position.

Shigemitsu asked if he might understand my statement as follows: If, beginning the 7th, Japanese troops do not attack Soviet troops and if firing from the Manchurian side is stopped, the Soviet side will not attack Japanese troops and not fire and bomb from the air either. At present the Japanese side is not making attacks on Soviet troops. They are only defending themselves from attacks from the Soviet side. May I understand -- said Shigemitsu further -- that an immediate order will be given to the Soviet troops not to attack Japanese troops. If so, the representatives of the troops on both sides will be able to enter into negotiations on the spot concerning the cessation of military operations.

I told Shigemitsu that he had not understood me entirely correctly, because he was trying to condition everything by the date and the attack while the center of gravity should lie in the problem of territory. Our troops will not attack Japanese troops as long as Japanese troops are situated on the other side of what we consider the boundary. In case, on the contrary, they cross the border, we will attack them on the 7th, 8th or 9th or other time. I don't know that it is necessary to issue a special command to our troops, because they always have orders to use arms exclusively for the repulse of attacks. If these attacks cease, our troops will not resort to arms.

In reply on this Shigemitsu said: In the problem of territory and boundary we don't have a common opinion. Japanese troops must defend Manchurian territory. Therefore, first of all it is necessary that Soviet troops should not violate this boundary. If, as you say, there are no longer any Japanese soldiers on Soviet territory, the problem of territory is not worth digging into. The question whether Japanese troops will attack hereafter depends entirely upon whether the Soviet troops attack the Japanese. Until now, the Japanese side has exercised restraint in the use of arms. If, however, attacks from the Soviet side take place even in the future, it will create undesirable consequences. However, you say that Soviet troops will not attack Japanese troops and will not fire at and bomb them. If such is the position of the Soviet side, it may be said that the Japanese side also will not resort to attacks and firing.

I told Shigemitsu that I thought I had expressed myself clearly enough and the ambassador must have understood me, although he talked as if he had not understood me. I am afraid that in such conditions talking will possibly be endless and we will never come to an understanding. It is not enough for me to have Japanese troops sit quietly and not fire. In case they sit on our territory and not fire, we will attack them with all means, including artillery and aviation in order to expel them from our territory. Our territory begins from the line on the map attached to the Hunch'un agreement. If the Japanese will retire behind this line and not fire, our troops also will not fire, bomb, or attack them. The ambassador refers to my information. My information concerns the status as of several hours ago. Before our order reaches our troops in the Far East, several more hours may elapse. If Japanese troops appear again on Soviet territory within this time, we will attack them in spite of any agreements. If the Japanese Government indeed trying to bring about the cessation of military actions, which we also hope, it must pledge that Japanese troops will never cross the border and will never fire across the border. Then there will come calm, because we have never attacked Japanese troops as long as they were on the other side of the boundary. This is clear and there is no longer any reason to return to this!

I summarize what I have said above. If the Japanese Government guarantees that there will be no Japanese soldier on our territory, for instance, by the 8th or 9th of August, -- in our understanding of this territory, -- and the firing on our side from the Manchurian side will cease, we are also prepared to guarantee that our troops will not cross the border, our understanding, and will not fire toward Manchukuo.

Shigemitsu said that if the words "in our understanding" were replaced by the words "in the Japanese understanding" or if, in place of this, it were stated that by 'boundary' was meant the line which both sides were defending, then there would not be any objections from the Japanese side to my proposal.

I point out to Shigemitsu that, when we speak of the frontier, we mean the existing frontier established by the Khunchun and other agreements and it is the only frontier we can speak of.

Shigemitsu's reply is, that according to their interpretation of the Khunchun agreement, the Japanese party considers that the frontier before July 11 should be the one between Manchukuo and the U.S.S.R.

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It means that the Chankufeng hill is a Manchurian territory. Therefore, it is desirable that the Soviet party should not attack the Japanese troops even if Changkufeng were now in the hands of the Japanese.

I say to Shigemitsu, I am afraid there is no use of conversing any longer and we had better discontinue the talk. We have shown the frontier on the map. The Beziyannaya and Chankufeng hills are on the Soviet territory. We shall defend them at any cost and we shall not yield an inch. If the Ambassador does not agree with me, we had better discontinue the conversation.

Shigemitsu stated that on the problem of the boundary line there was a difference in opinion on both sides from the very beginning. He told me from the very beginning that the Japanese side did not agree with the opinion of the Soviet side. The Japanese side can not change its original opinion even now. Therefore, there should not be any misunderstandings here. As for the cessation of military action, he, Shigemitsu, from the very beginning understood me that the Soviet side welcomed it. Both to-day and last time, he had heard from me a clear answer that if the Japanese troops did not attack, the Soviet side also would stop attacking. It was a matter of how to stop the military operations in fact. He, Shigemitsu considered it to be reasonable that the cessation of military operations might be achieved, if both sides would withdraw a specified distance from the line that they were occupying. This would mean a factual cessation of military action. The problem of the boundary might be considered in the negotiations between the representatives of both sides.

I told Shigemitsu that I did not request that he establish the boundary with me now. The ambassador made the proposal for the cessation of military action. I explained how this might be concretely realized. There exists a definite line that neither the one side nor the other must cross. This line is shown on the map. Across this line they must not fire. Then calm would be restored. We should welcome it if the Japanese troops were retreated still farther -- this would be an additional guarantee of calm, because they first began firing, having broken the calm on the border and first put their artillery into operation.

There is no reason for us to withdraw our troops, because they have never moved forward on to Manchurian territory before and will not move forward hereafter.

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We can guarantee that they will not pass across the boundary indicated on the map.

As I pointed out last time, we do not object to the redemarcation of this sector. But I call your attention to the fact, that we do not mean the establishment of a new frontier, but the redemarcation of the frontier, established by the Hunch'un agreement. Therefore it will be useless to commence this work unless the recognition of the Hunch'un agreement with the map and the protocols attached, is set as principle of it.

Shigemitsu said that such a redemarcation might be effected in the said sector on the basis of existing materials and agreements. The Japanese side does not object to the fact that the Hunch'un Agreement would be one of the materials to be studied. However, along with it the materials to be submitted by Manchoukuo should be studied. Such work, of course, should be conducted between Manchoukuo and the USSR, but Japan would not withhold necessary help. His, Shigemitsu's, proposal, however, envisaged the following: Without awaiting the results of the labors of such a commission, both sides should cease military operations, retaining the positions held today. As a result of the withdrawal of troops of both sides there would be created an empty sector. If the redemarcation of this sector were carried out, too, all the data and materials at the disposal of the Soviet, Manchurian, and Japanese sides would be utilized in the work of the commission.

I pointed out to Shigemitsu that we might again much time if we did not repeat the already rejected proposals. I had already rejected the ambassador's proposal for the cessation of military operations on the basis of the situation as of to-day or tomorrow. I told him that I could accept the proposal for the cessation of military operations only on one basis: Restoration of the situation existing before the commencement of military operations, i. e., before July 29.

Troops from both sides may remain where they were before July 29, i. e., before the beginning of military operations. As for the redemarcation I had already explained that a boundary is fixed only by international agreements and therefore we cannot recognize any other materials. If Japan presents another Russo-Chinese agreement later than that of Hunch'un, then we agree to make it the basis of the work of the redemarcation commission. If not, then the Hunch'un agreement with its attached documents and maps will remain the only document. The redemarcation commission must be bipartite with an equal number of representatives from each (of the two) sides. If our side has two representatives, there will be from the other side one representative from Japan and one Manchurian. Since we are carrying on a fight not with Manchoukuo, but with Japan, participation of the Japanese Government in this commission is desirable for us.

Shigemitsu

Shigemitsu stated that since the position of the Japanese Government on the question of the Hunch'un Agreement has been repeatedly explained by him, he would not be repetitions. From my remarks he saw that the Soviet side did not object to the establishment of the redemarcation commission. He would study thoroughly today's conversation with me so that he might make clear to himself how to go about finding a practical means of settlement of the whole question. However, he does not find grounds for change of his own proposal on cessation of military operations.

I told Shigemitsu that I could repeat my counter-proposal.

Shigemitsu stated that what I called my counter-proposal was a list of critical remarks expressed by my concerning his proposal.

I pointed out to Shigemitsu that I had given concrete explanations of the conditions under which the ambassador's proposal could be realized. That constituted my counter-proposal.

Shigemitsu repeated that his proposal amounted to both sides ceasing fire in the position in which they happened to be at the present moment and withdrawing a certain distance. The Japanese side is ready for the carrying out of the redemarcation. But it is useless to speak of redemarcation in the present situation.

I said to Shigemitsu that I summarized my counter-proposal in the following way: We consent to ceasing military operations if both parties obligate themselves not to cross and not to fire over a definite line. If by the moment of agreement either side is shown to have crossed over this line, it must be immediately withdrawn. The line which is drawn on the map of the Hunch'un Agreement must be this line, in other words, the position of troops which existed prior to July 29, i. e., the beginning of military operations. When calm has been restored, it will be possible to set about the border demarcation in the given sector on the basis of the Hunch'un Agreement and the maps and protocols attached thereto. If the Japanese side submits another agreement between Russia and China, concluded after the Hunch'un Agreement, then such agreement will form the basis of work of the commission. The commission must be bipartite. On the one hand, there will be two representatives of the U.S.S.R. and, on the other, one each from Japan and Manchoukuo.

Shigemitsu stated, that he could not regard what I had said as a counter-proposal, because what I had said was, in his opinion, a collection of critical remarks, which had been made by me from the outbreak of the incident. But, the incident had begun with the occupation of Changkufeng by Soviet troops. The Soviet side protested its desire to settle the incident

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in a peaceful way, but what had been said by me bore little relation to these desires. In any case, he, Shigemitsu wanted to study to-day's conversation, and possibly, it would be necessary for him to re-elucidate his opinion as a result of studying this conversation.

After this I made the following statement to Shigemitsu:

To-day I have received a report about a new attack on Soviet territory, in the sector of the Gladukha barrier located in the Grodekovo district (region). Firing a heavy machine-gun, Japanese troops suddenly attacked our border guards, who were defending Hill 588 situated 22 kilometers south-west of Grodekovo on Soviet territory. Our reinforcements which soon arrived the scene of battle, were fired upon by a machine-gun, after which the Japanese hid themselves on Manchurian territory, leaving 10 hand-grenades and 50 detonators. Several men on our side were wounded in this connection. Probably, the other side also had wounded. Such an attack doubtless lowers the "peace-loving" proposals of the Japanese Government. To protest is obviously useless and therefore my government commissioned me to give warning that we cannot and do not wish in future to permit an unpunished firing on our border guards and even a momentary occupation of parts of our territory. We are filled with determination to take the most severe measures in similar cases, in future, including the use of aviation and artillery. It is time to put a stop to similar excursions of Japanese soldiers in our territory and to target practice.

Shigemitsu stated, that before coming to see me, he had seen a telegram concerning this incident, but had decided not to go into its details, since he did not want to be late. However, the circumstances of the incident were not so as I had outlined him. Crossing the border, Soviet troops had attacked a Japanese out-post. As a result of this, the incident had broken out. The telegram from Tokyo had suggested that he enter a protest. He should study this telegram and then give an answer to my statement.

I told Shigemitsu that I greatly regretted that the Japanese government in such cases, gave the usual answer, not admitting the facts of border violation and ascribing these facts to the Soviets. However, these answers did not lead us astray. I ask the ambassador to communicate to his government the warning which I gave (him) to-day.

Shigemitsu promised to communicate it and said that he thought that the answer of the Japanese government to this would follow.

Litvinov.

Copy

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Copy on ten sheets made from the original diary recording the conversation of M. M. Litvinov with Shigemitsu of 7 August 1938.

The original diary recording the conversation of M. M. Litvinov with Shigemitsu of 7 August 1938 is preserved in the files of the Central Government Historical Archives of the city of Moscow.

Chief of the Central Government
Historical Archives of the city of Moscow.

/Signature/ V. Maksakov

/Seal of the Central Government Historical Archives
in Moscow -- Ministry of Internal Affairs U.S.S.R./

3 December 1946.