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Memorandum of a Conversation

[Washington,] November 18, 1941

The Japanese Ambassador and Mr. Kurusu called on the Secretary, by appointment made at their request, at the Department.

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Turning to the question of the Tripartite Pact, Mr. Kurusu said that he could not say that Japan would abrogate the Tripartite Pact but that Japan might do something which would "outshine" the Tripartite Pact.

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The Ambassador repeated that the situation in Japan was very pressing and that it was important to arrest a further deterioration of the relations between the two countries. He suggested that if this situation could now be checked an atmosphere would develop when it would be possible to move in the direction of the courses which this Government advocated. He pointed out that big ships cannot turn around too quickly, that they have to be eased around slowly and gradually.

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Mr. Kurusu pointed out that a comprehensive solution cannot be worked out immediately, that he could make no promises. He said that our freezing regulations had caused impatience in Japan and a feeling that Japan had to fight while it still could. If we could come to some settlement now, he said, it would promote an atmosphere which would be conducive to discussing fundamentals. The Secretary asked if he did not think that something could be worked out on the Tripartite Pact. The Ambassador said that he desired to emphasize that Japan would not be a cat's-paw for Germany, that Japan's purpose in entering into the Tripartite alliance was to use it for Japan's own purposes, that Japan entered the Tripartite Pact because Japan felt isolated. The Secretary observed that it would be difficult to get public opinion in this country to understand the situation as Mr. Kurusu had described it.

He then asked what the Ambassador had in mind in regard to the Chinese situation and whether the Japanese stood for no annexations no indemnities, respect for China's sovereignty, territorial integrity and the principle of equality. The Ambassador replied in the affirmative.

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Turning to the China situation the Secretary asked how many soldiers the Japanese wanted to retain in China. The Ambassador replied that possibly 90 per cent would be withdrawn.

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J[oseph] W. B[allantine]