

10-25-47

Mr. M. Shigemitsu, 1940 - 1941.

Statement by the Rt. Hon. Lord Hankey, GCB., GCMG., GCVO.

This statement is directed primarily to such knowledge as I possess of the circumstances in which Mr. Shigemitsu, Imperial Japanese Ambassador in London during the early years of the late war, sought at the end of March, 1941, to visit Central Europe in order to meet Mr. Matsuoka, Foreign Minister of the Japanese Government during his official visit to Germany and Italy.

2. In order to throw light on the Ambassador's motives in projecting this visit it is necessary to refer to certain conversations in which I took part in the last five months of the previous year. The dates of the talks are extracted from my official engagement book, and other particulars mainly from contemporary notes and correspondence, filled in, where necessary, from memory.

September - December, 1940.

3. Early in September, 1940, when I was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, with Cabinet rank, in Mr. Churchill's Government, I received a verbal invitation from Major-General F.S.G. Piggott, D.S.O., former British Military Attaché at Tokyo and an old friend of the Washington Naval Conference, 1921-22, to meet Mr. Shigemitsu at lunch. The invitation was sponsored by another old friend and colleague, the late

Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, Secretary of State for the Colonies, who, as Chairman of the British Council, was concerned at the deterioration of Anglo-Japanese relations. It was made clear to me from the first that Viscount Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, approved this contact and that the conversation would be informal and non-committal.

4. The first meeting took place in a private room at the Savoy Hotel on September 11th, 1940: present Lord Lloyd, Mr. Shigemitsu, Viscount Kano, General Figgott, Mr. George Sale, and myself. I made no notes of the afterlunch conversation, but to the best of my recollection it centred round the deterioration in Anglo-Japanese relations, which had started after the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance at Washington in 1921-22, and what steps could be taken to improve them.

5. The second meeting was on September 25th, again at lunch, in a private room at the Savoy Hotel. The personnel was the same as before, except that Viscount Kano was not present. The conversation was resumed where it had left off on September 11th, namely on a proposal, either initiated or at least warmly supported by Mr. Shigemitsu (who had been working on these lines during the previous summer) that an official British Government Mission, headed by a Minister of Cabinet rank, should proceed to Tokyo, nominally to attend some forthcoming ceremonial anniversary, but also to take the opportunity to

make the British case better known, to rally our friends and the British Colony, and to counter the propaganda of the numerous Nazi visitors to Japan. This proposal met with general acceptance and Lord Lloyd undertook to speak to Lord Halifax.

6. Two days later, on September 27th, the signature of the Tripartite Pact - Germany, Italy, Japan - was announced and Japan became a member of the Axis, but not a belligerent. This was a damper on the idea of an official mission.

7. On November 20th the third and last luncheon meeting took place, this time in a private room at the Ritz Hotel, where Lord Lloyd, Mr. Shigemitsu, General Piggott and I were the guests of Commander McGrath. The idea of a Government Mission had to be dropped, but Lord Lloyd proposed instead a mission to be sent by the British Council. On his suggestion there was general agreement that I ought to lead the mission, a proposal that was supported enthusiastically by Mr. Shigemitsu. I was prepared to undertake the mission if officially asked to do so. Lord Lloyd undertook to report the proposal to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. But relations with Japan were continuing to deteriorate, and the moment was never deemed opportune for the visit.

8. The point I wish to emphasize in the above episode is Mr. Shigemitsu's intense desire throughout to stop the rot in Anglo-Japanese relations, and to take some definite step,

such as the proposed Mission to Japan, with that object. I was convinced of his genuineness and I believe all those present at the conversations shared my view.

1941.

Conversation with Mr. Shigemitsu on March 22nd.

9. In February, 1941, Lord Lloyd, who had been the leading spirit in the above episode, died and no further meetings of the group took place.

10. In March I received messages that Mr. Shigemitsu would very much appreciate a private and informal conversation with me, and after a talk with Mr. P.A. Butler, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Foreign Office, who was concerned with Japanese affairs, I consented. During the German night-bombing campaign Mr. Shigemitsu had a house at Fwhurst, Surrey, where General Piggott lived, and our conversation took place in the General's home. It lasted several hours and was frank and sincere throughout. General Piggott was present most of the time and afterwards made some notes, which I approved two days later, subject to one amendment.

11. It is unnecessary to describe in detail this long conversation. We went over all the old ground covered by the conversations of 1940, but focussed mainly on recent events, especially Japan's adherence to the Axis and Mr. Matsuoka's impending visit to Berlin and Rome, which had made a deplorable

impression on British public opinion. The Ambassador deeply regretted that his country had joined the Axis but pointed out that the Japanese Government, cold-shouldered by their former Allies, who disapproved their policy in China, and from whom they were now almost cut off by exiguous communications, had tended to drift towards the Germans, who cultivated their friendship persistently. He quoted Mr. Matsuoka's statement that Japan's policy was one of peace. but he did not under-rate my contention that Japan, like Italy, might pass from passive to active membership of the Axis, and that Mr. Matsuoka, in visiting Berlin, would be exposed to the full force of Hitler's demonstrations of German power, his blandishments and threats. This might easily lead to war between Japan and Britain and perhaps to the intervention of the U.S.A. Although the Ambassador remarked that, in that event, Japan could give us a bad time at first, he was under no illusions as to the ultimate danger to his country.

12. In fact it was clear that Mr. Shigemitsu's main object in this conversation was to find some means of countering this risk. He agreed that the time had passed for an official British Mission, which might in his view have produced results in the previous summer, when he had first mooted it. But he thought that it would still be useful to send a few influential British citizens to explain the allied situation

to Japan and to emphasize the importance of recent victories in North Africa and the Mediterranean, which was not realized in Japan. In this connection he contrasted the disparity between the continuous human contacts between Germany and Japan with the latter's isolation from Great Britain. He believed that the drift towards Germany was by no means universally popular among the Japanese, and gave some evidence to support it.

13. The Ambassador hinted at the possibility that Mr. Matsuoka might be induced to come to London on the return journey but we did not pursue that idea that day. Next day, however, as General Poggott reported at once to me, he told the General that he had decided to urge Prince Konoe (Prime Minister) by telegram to try and induce Mr. Matsuoka to return to Japan via London in order to counteract the effects of his visits to Berlin and Rome. He expressed the hope that the British Ambassador in Tokyo might be similarly instructed by the Foreign Office.

The proposed visit to Central Europe.

15. On March 28th General Piggott gave me a message that Mr. Shigemitsu felt that he must make contact with Mr. Matsuoka somewhere in Central Europe, preferably at Berne, where they would be free from the influence of Berlin or Rome, and asking for my good offices in obtaining a passage to Lisbon for himself and his Military Attaché.

16. Inquiry showed that there was tremendous competition

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for these passages. The matter seemed so urgent and important that on March 31st I appealed direct to the Prime Minister for a priority passage. I supported the appeal by stating that in the conversation on March 22nd the Japanese Ambassador had professed (genuinely I thought) to believe in the certainty of our ultimate victory, but that it was uncertain that his reports were sufficiently read or taken to heart by Mr. Matsuoka, and that was one reason why he wished to make this contact. After our recent victories in the Mediterranean it would seem especially important to ensure that Mr. Matsuoka got to know the truth. I suggested that the Ambassador ought to be allowed to take his Military Attaché. The journey to Lisbon and Berne was a formidable undertaking for a man with a wooden leg. He might find himself amid adverse surroundings in seeing Mr. Matsuoka, and it was advisable to strengthen him with a kindred spirit with whom he could talk freely and take counsel.

17. The journey, however, did not take place for reasons which can best be explained by the following letter from Mr. Shigemitsu to myself dated April 2nd:-

I regret that the above is a first copy.

(Signature)  
21 December, 1941.



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COPY.

I certify that this is a true copy.

(Sgd) Hankey,  
28 December, 1946.

JAPANESE EMBASSY,

LONDON, W.  
2nd April, 1941.

My dear Lord Hankey,

I was so glad to have the opportunity, when you telephoned me, to explain why I had to cancel my proposed trip. On looking into the ways and means of getting to Switzerland, where I would have liked to meet my friend, I unexpectedly found that it took several days to get there from Lisbon. From Lisbon I would have had to go to Barcelona by plane and from Barcelona onwards by train, the latter only running twice a week with all reservations booked up for some time ahead. I did my best to get this information in good time, but found it physically impossible to arrange such a complicated journey at the time at my disposal, in spite of the fact that my friend having abandoned his idea of going to Vichy was kind enough to say he would wait several days for me if I could manage to make the journey. The only alternative was for me to meet him in Berlin but I did not like to do this, and so very reluctantly had to give up the whole idea. It seemed impossible to arrange in

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spite of all the kindness and trouble taken by my British friends to arrange the necessary facilities. I had hoped to be able to do my bit for our cause, but I assure you that I shall always continue my efforts on the same lines.

I am most grateful for all the invaluable help you were kind enough to give me in the matter and am only too sorry that I was unable to avail myself of it. This letter is to explain the circumstances which compelled me to cancel the trip and to express my sincere appreciation of your kindness in the matter.

Yours very sincerely,

(Sgd.) M. SHIGEMITSU.

The Rt. Hon. Lord Hankey,  
GCB., GCMG., GCVO.

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18. In conclusion I stress the following points which emerge from the above summary:-

- (i) Mr. Shigemitsu's intense and consistent desire to keep Japan from entering the war on the side of the Axis.
- (ii) That is supported by his original desire in the summer and early autumn that a British official mission should be sent to Japan; by his support to the subsequent proposal for a British Council mission; by his persistence, in March, 1941, in the plan of sending selected British citizens; by his desire that Mr. Matsuoka should be induced to return via London to counteract the effect of the Berlin and Rome visits; and by his attempt to make contact with Mr. Matsuoka, in order to bring home to the Foreign Minister the purport of his own despatches, and in conjunction with his Military Attaché to emphasize the importance of the British successes in North Africa, and, presumably, to induce the Foreign Minister to return via London.
- (iii) The following passage in his letter to me of 2nd April, 1941, is particularly significant of his attitude:-

"I had hoped to do my bit for our cause, but I assure you that I shall always continue my efforts on the same lines."

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(iv) Throughout the whole series of conversation, extending over six months, I cannot find or recollect a word to cast doubt on Mr. Shigemitsu's bona fides, and I believe that my associates would confirm that view.

30th December, 1946.

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WHITHALL 1234.  
Ext. 270.

TREASURY CHAMBERS,

WHITHALL, S.W.1.

30th December, 1946.

Dear Mr. Furness,

I enclose a statement of the evidence which I am prepared to give to the Tokyo Court about Mr. Mamoru Shigemitsu if officially asked by the Court to do so. In addition I am prepared to answer interrogatories on the subject.

I have sent copies of the statement to Mr. Denning of the Foreign Office, with a suggestion that they might, with advantage, send a copy to His Majesty's Ambassador at Tokyo in case the Court should require it.

Very sincerely yours,

(Sgd.) Hankey

George A. Furness, Esq.