

No 2877

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From Nomura to Toyoda
18 August 1941
No. 709

I met the President in secret at 4:30 PM on the 17th (Sunday), the Secretary of State being present. The President spoke about the days he had spent at sea, telling me that the climate was favorable and that it was seldom foggy, and that everything had progressed satisfactorily. He sailed in his yacht to the warship, and the place of meeting was, it seems, off the coast of Maine.

We proceeded to business. The President said, with a paper in his hand, that, whereas he, the Secretary of State and myself are eager for the peace of the Pacific, others are not, as if suggesting that there are many advocates of war. As I told him in reply that there are many among the third Powers who earnestly desire war in the Pacific, he immediately affirmed it, declaring that, although Britain as well as the United States, and probably the Soviet Union too, are eager for the peace of the Pacific, there is a country which does not wish it, and that it is one which has no warship in the Pacific. He even used the words "our German friend". Pointing out that he and the Secretary of State as well as myself are not diplomats by career, the President suggested we might act without regard to diplomatic practice. He then read aloud in a clear voice the note I have conveyed to you by my telegram No. 707, telling me emphatically that this is not a diplomatic document nor an aide-memoire but a note of what he wants to convey. He added that though he did not like to state such a thing, it might be better to make the matter clear.

I stated, in accordance with your successive instructions, that the Japanese Government is sincere in the desire of adjusting diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States; that the Japanese Government desires to know whether the President will meet Prince Konoe; that the conversation between the two heads should proceed along the lines of the unofficial conversations which we have been having for the past several months; that, in connection with the French Indo-China question, we have conveyed the views of the Japanese Government to the Secretary of State; that Prince Konoe is ready to make an exchange of views with an eye to the general peace of the world; that, while expecting high statesmanship from the government of the United States, Japan is believed ready to reciprocate. In conclusion, I stated that everything depends, after all, upon the statesmanship of the President. The President listened intently, and replied, with the note of the telegram No. 708 in his hand, that it is difficult for geographical reasons to go as far as Honolulu, as he is forbidden to travel by aeroplane.

He said that the Japanese Premier would find it difficult to come to San Francisco or to Seattle, and suggested Juneau. (The place is in Alaska. I think he mentioned Sitka, but it is not certain.) He asked me how many days it takes to go to Juneau from Japan, and I answered that it will take about ten days. He inquired again about climatic conditions there around the middle of October, so I replied that they would be all right until that time or thereabouts.

He said that he had amended the note a little for the reasons above described, and explained, before reading out the note, that the removal of the word "President" from the original draft was solely because of the geographical difficulty. He declared, then,

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that he is by no means pleased at the present "closed door" policy, but that it is being taken against his will in response to action on the part of Japan. It therefore depends entirely upon the attitude of Japan whether the closed door shall be opened, he said, and now it is Japan's turn. After the discussion about French Indo-China, the Acting Secretary of State called our attention to the fact that Thailand had been added there. The President was very polite and cordial throughout the conversation, and received us with tactful manner. (The success of the recent conversation with Churchill.... words missing... Wilson's Fourteen Points were enunciated by the Government of the United States alone. But this time, the United States has succeeded in persuading Britain to participate in a joint declaration of "peace terms". There is no doubt that he is pleased with the people's support thereof. Moreover, he had just spent more than ten days on the sea, which he likes so much, and he seemed in an especially good humor.) The Secretary of State said, on parting, that he would be glad to see me at any time. As regards the China problem, we left it untouched today, to be discussed separately.

In the course of the conversation, the President mentioned the name of Mr. Walker, the Postmaster-General. His constant efforts for the promotion of friendly relations between Japan and the United States are much to be appreciated, and it is to his good offices that we may probably owe the prompt realization of the present interview. My opinion in this connection will be submitted separately.