

AMBASSADOR GROW'S REPORT THAT WAR MIGHT BE "INEVITABLE"

In a telegram of November 3, 1941 Ambassador Grow reported to the Department of State on the current situation in Japan. He warned against acceptance of any theory that the weakening and final exhaustion of Japanese financial and economic resources would result shortly in Japan's collapse as a militarist nation. He pointed out that despite severe cuts in industrial output, the loss of most of Japan's commerce, and the depletion of national resources, such a collapse had not occurred; but instead there was being drastically prosecuted the integration of Japanese national economy. Events so far, he said, had given no support for the view that war in the Far East could best be averted by imposition of commercial embargoes. He said that considering the temper of the people of Japan it was dangerously uncertain to base United States policy on a view that the imposition of progressive and rigorous economic measures would probably avert war; that it was the view of the Embassy that war would not be averted by such a course.

The Ambassador said it was his purpose to insure against the United States becoming involved in war with Japan through any misconception of Japanese capacity to plunge into a "suicidal struggle" with us. Although reason, he said, would dictate against such a happening, our own standards of logic could not be used to measure Japanese rationality. While we need not be overly concerned by the "belligerent" utterances of the Japanese press, it would be short-sighted to underestimate the obvious preparations of Japan; it would be short-sighted also if our policy were based on a belief that these preparations amounted merely to saber rattling. Finally, he warned of the possibility of Japan's adopting measures with dramatic and dangerous suddenness which might make inevitable a war with the United States.

Four days later, on November 7, Secretary Hull stated at a Cabinet meeting that relations between Japan and the United States were extremely critical and that there was "imminent possibility" that Japan might at any time start a new military movement of conquest by force. It thereupon became

the consensus of the Cabinet that the critical situation might well be emphasized in speeches in order that the country would, if possible, be better prepared for such a development. Accordingly, Secretary of the Navy Knox delivered an address on November 11, 1941 in which he stated that we were not only confronted with the necessity of extreme measures of self-defense in the Atlantic, but we were "likewise faced with grim possibilities on the other side of the world -- on the far side of the Pacific"; that the Pacific no less than the Atlantic called for instant readiness for defense. On the same day Under Secretary of State Welles, carrying out the Cabinet suggestion in an address, stated that beyond the Atlantic a sinister and pitiless conqueror had reduced more than half of Europe to abject servitude and that in the Far East the same forces of conquest were menacing the safety of all nations bordering on the Pacific. The waves of world conquest were "breaking high both in the East and in the West", he said, and were threatening, more and more with each passing day, "to engulf our own shores". He warned that the United States was in far greater peril than in 1917; that "at any moment war may be forced upon us".

On November 17 Ambassador Grew cabled from Tokyo that in calling attention to the necessity for vigilance against sudden Japanese naval or military attack in regions not then involved in the Chinese-Japanese conflict, he considered it probable that the Japanese would make use of every possible tactical advantage, including surprise and initiative. The Ambassador said that in Japan there was an extremely effective control over military information and that as a consequence it was unlikely that the Embassy would be able to give substantial warning.

Excerpt from "Peace and War"
Official Publication
Department of State, U. S. G.
Pages 130 and 131