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German Embassy

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J. NO. 523/37

In Addition to the report of 16/3/37, J. NO. 474/37

With two Annexes

Political Report --- Confidential

CONTENTS:

Conversation with Foreign Minister Sato on the  
Anti-Comintern Pact.

The summary of Foreign Minister SATO's speech published in English and American newspapers in Japan gives us an impression that he regards the German-Japanese Pact as an unavoidable evil, or at best as an agreement necessitated or technical and police purposes in view of the existence of the Comintern. This unfavorable impression is deepened by a perusal of the shorthand record of his speech (cf. Annex I). Precisely analysed, his way of thinking as revealed in his speech might even lead us to the conclusion, as is he hypothesized that no such pact existed and, on this basis, intended to endeavour to arrive at an understanding with the Soviet Union.

I

In order to forestall any such tendencies in time, I deemed it proper to call on the Minister and exchange views with him, in a friendly yet unequivocal manner, on these parts of his speech,

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which related to the Anti-Comintern Pact, and at the same time, to call his attention generally to the extremely unsatisfactory treatment of the agreement by newspapers and by the Diet. I thought it important to make clear at the beginning that I called on him on my own initiative and not on the instructions of my government. I then asserted that the official and responsible circles in Japan, as well as the people at large had given approval to the Pact and that the public opinion in Japan had been according the Pact an increasingly strong support. I expressed my regret that the attacks on the Pact in the press and the Diet, which were fairly violent in some parts and which were due principally to the internal political implications, had impressed foreign countries as if not only this Pact itself, but also the pro-German policy in general had been disapproved of by the political circles at large of Japan. An overestimation of the circles in question could give rise in Europe to an opinion, as if Japan were going to denounce the Anti-Comintern-Pact. This opinion have gained possibly still more ground through the parliamentary debates, in the course of which various interpellators, in particular the strongly liberal and independant representative OZAKI, had expressed more or less openly their opposition to that Pact. To all these attacks, I told him, the Government had answered only with the sober confirmation of Premier HAYASHI, that he upheld what the Pact and its political aims stood for. Next I pointed out to the Foreign Minister that at the time

of his ministerial inauguration, the Japanese public opinion revealed not a little concern, as to the future destiny of the Pact inasmuch as the press, especially the French press, had spread a false conception as if he had disapproved of the existence of that Pact. To support my statement, I handed to SATO an excerpt from the "Japan Chronicle" (cf. Annex 2), concerning an interview, allegedly given by the Foreign Minister to French journalist Lachin for the magazine "Anous la liberte", in the course of which the Minister was said to have declared that he had from the beginning been opposed the conclusion of the Pact.

Then I proceeded to discuss in details of SATO's parliamentary speech. I explained to the Foreign Minister that his speech in no way served to rectify substantially the above mentioned opinion, theretofore prevalent, as to his negative attitude towards the Pact. He gave a very narrow and limited interpretation to the Pact by ascribing its raison d'etre exclusively to the existence and activities of the Comintern and thereby declaring that from the standpoint of the Russo-Japanese relationship it had to be regarded as "an unhappy and regrettable event. When he added, by way of a conditional remark, that the Japanese Government, despite the existence of the Comintern, would endeavour to improve the relations between the two peoples, in many respects congenial, and whenever possible to reestablish between Japan and Russia the sincerely cordial relations that had lasted for 12 years, he naturally gave rise to an impression that

he maintained towards the Pact a predominantly negative attitude and that he had chosen as his political objective the realization of more or less close relationship with the Soviet Union. From the very fact that he did not speak a single word about the relationship with Germany, it was easy to infer that he did not hold this relationship in any high estimation. I went on to say that as for myself, however, I was naturally convinced that all these presumptions were unfounded, for the Foreign Minister himself confirmed in our first interview that he would support the Pact wholeheartedly. Nevertheless it was truly desirable that the world opinion also, and especially the German public opinion, be enlightened as to the false suppositions caused by parliamentary speeches and debates, for even though the German newspapers had not published the Japanese attacks on the Pact, the political circles in Germany had nevertheless been not a little surprised at the development of such a phenomenon. For instance, General Goring had in December last year lodged a protest with general OSHIMA against the attitude of the Japanese press. I expressed my opinion that it would therefore be greatly effective if the Foreign Minister by way of an interview with DAB or VB correspondents in Japan, would speak a few words directly to Germany, in order to disperse the suspicion prevalent in Germany, and at the same time to crash the hopes and speculations of our antagonists.

II

In answer to this, Mr. SATO stated as follows:

1) With regard to his alleged interview with the French journalist Lachin, published in a Paris magazine, he himself seemed very much surprised. The conversation appearing in the excerpt from the Chronicle had been held long before his departure from Paris. He had not given Lachin any "interview", but had merely talked with him in a friendly manner. Lachin had published this conversation in an entirely rehashed form.

Concerning his attitude towards the Anti-Comintern Pact, he referred me what he had stated in our first conversation. As he explained to me at that time, he was not informed until very late of the negotiations which had been in progress in the previous year; strictly speaking, not until the cabinet council in Tokyo had already given its approval to the Pact.

Since Japan was then on extremely bad terms with Britain and again, was not on particularly agreeable terms with the United States, he doubted the timeliness of the Pact. Circumstances being such, he feared that the Pact would aggravate further the diplomatic difficulties Japan had already been confronted with. He himself had always supported wholeheartedly the maintenance of friendly relations with Germany and with him the idea of fighting the Comintern was personally entertained. He had indeed made effort towards this direction already in the year of 1922 when Japan negotiated with the Bolshevists in Geneva.

With regard to his attitude, towards the Pact in the Diet, he said that it was not so negative as I had described it. He positively supported the Pact in the course of debate held by the Budget Committee of the House of Peers and especially in answer to viscount of OKOCHI's interpellation, he emphatically supported the Pact.

In subsequent meetings when he discussed in detail the question of the Russo-Japanese relationship, he naturally had to take into consideration the fact that the Anti-Comintern Pact had strained the Russo-Japanese relationship and had rendered impossible the signature of the fishery agreement. This gave rise to strong feeling of unrest in the public opinion in Japan.

He thought it highly regrettable if in Germany a false impression had really been created as to his attitude towards the Pact. So, he promised me to take into consideration, in compliance with my views, the advisability of addressing to the German public of on an appropriate opportunity.

2) Entering into the general question of the Japanese foreign policy, the Minister added that he might as well inform me at this moment that his task in the immediate future lay in the establishment of a better relationship with Britain. In the relationship between the two, the unfavourable economic considerations as above-mentioned had been playing a great part. Japanese exports had been confronted with great difficulties in the third power markets. In every respect it was imperative for Japan to arrive at an understanding with Britain. Therefore,

if in future he referred to Britain alone, without mentioning the Japanese-German relationship, it would by no means be due to any disregard of the relationship with Germany, which relationship being really secured, but would be due merely to a desire for the necessary lightening of burden of the Japanese foreign policy.

The Minister went on to say that he would endeavour to achieve an amicable settlement also with China. Although some influential political circles in Japan are desirous of keeping China or at least North China, in Japanese monopoly, so to speak, he does not share this desire. It is his belief that China should be left open to all powers.

3) I assured the Minister that the German Government fully appreciated Japan's desire to achieve an amicable settlement with Britain and China and that such efforts were in perfect conformity with the German policy. Inasmuch as Germany on her part was also seeking to establish friendly relationship with England, it would be much to her pleasure if our friend Japan succeeded in mitigating the strain between Britain and herself.

Likewise Germany would heartily welcome realization of Sino-Japanese friendly relationship, because in addition to the very friendly relationship with Japan, Germany desired to maintain also with China agreeable relationship based upon various German interests in China.

4) Ultimately the Minister SATO said that he thought any further aggravation of Japan's relationship with the Soviet Union



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undesirable, because the overall situation of Japan was still too uncertain for Japan to stand such aggravation. Manchuria had been consolidated but little and still required an investment on a large scale.

### III

Concerning the attitudes of various political factors in Japan towards the Pact, I have set forth my opinion in my report of 14 March, 1937-J. No. 448/37 on the establishment of the German-Japanese commission in Tokyo. In conclusion I could sum up as follows:

The Pact stands upon a sound basis and is approved of by influential political circles, especially by the army. In the face of this fact, the lukewarm attitude of the new Foreign Minister which, however, had been rectified immediately, is of no decisive importance.

Nevertheless, in order to forestall at the very beginning any attempt likely to impress the public opinion and especially the third powers as if the Pact were unimportant or as if it were to lose its significance by and by, I believed it not only proper but also necessary to hold this conversation. I felt that this objective had been, so far as it is possible, achieved. I have also received an impression that in his public speeches in the future Mr. SATO will pay more attention to Japan's relationship with Germany. The German Embassy in Nanking has safely received a copy of this report. (Signed) Von Dirkseu.

Annex I to the report from Tokyo J. No. 523  
dated 24 March 1937.

Translation

An extract from the answer by Foreign Minister SATO  
at the House of Representatives on 11 March, 1937.

Then Mr. ASHIDA made a series of interpellations concerning the relations between Japan and the Soviet Union. I could sum up in answer as follows. On 8 March I spoke at the House of Peers in pointing out that the relations between Japan and Soviet Union as well as between the latter and other countries would be much more pleasant should such an organization as the so called Comintern never existed in Russia. Somebody had criticised my view as absurd, on the ground that it would be impossible for Comintern to more emigrate-elsewhere from Russia and therefore any improvement of Russo-Japanese diplomatic relations or a satisfactory settlement of various problems between them can never be expected. Another criticised my saying that the problems between Japan and Soviet Union, should be solved regardless of the existence of the Comintern. I also am of opinion that this criticism is doubtlessly correct. I have not, however, stated my views then out of misconception of these facts. Because there exists a special organization called the Comintern, the Russia's neighbours have to take special caution toward it. It is also understandable that the countries which feel themselves threathend by it, because of its international character are compelled to take also international defensive measures. On account of these

defensive measures, it is unavoidable under the present international situation that various suspicion and apprehension arise. The German-Japanese Agreement had come into existence precisely as such a defensive measure. It would not have been necessary to take into consideration such an agreement as the Anti-Comintern Pact, if the Comintern had not existed; in that event such misunderstandings etc. between Japan and Soviet Union, resulting from the conclusion of that agreement could have been avoided the relations between the two countries would have been far better. Anti-Comintern Pact itself much therefore be regarded as an unfortunated event, if be diplomatic relations between Japan and Soviet Russia alone are taken into consideration. Nevertheless there is not denying that the Agreement was unavoidable with respect to the Comintern. There are at present various outstanding problems between Japan and the Soviet Union. I myself am of the opinion, that exert her utmost for the solution of these pending problems and also for the improvement of the diplomatic relations between the two countries. If I am not mistaken, the same view is held by Mr. ASHIDA, I hold fast to this view, and wish to conduct my future work according to this determination. If I am allowed to speak of past events, the dipomatic relations between Japan and Russia were truly cordial, for several years, despite the after-effect of Yoshizawa-Karahan agreement concluded in Peking in 1926, as well as the unfortunate incident at Nikolzensk. Since I am of the opinion that the Japanese and Russians have something in common in their sentiments,

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so I believe that the revival of the relations 12 years ago  
is not at all, impossible, if the competent authorities of  
both countries should wish for future peace and do their duties  
sincerely and without prejudice. (cheers)

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O F O R I G I N

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Yale Maxon (Signed)