

Exhibit 2891

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Memorandum by the Ambassador in Japan (Grew)

[Tokyo,] August 18, 1941

The Minister for Foreign Affairs asked me to call at 4 o'clock this afternoon and in an oral statement which took two hours and a half to be delivered, interpreted from Japanese into English and transcribed by me, Admiral Toyoda set forth a proposal of prime importance for solving the present critical situation between Japan and the United States. He pointed out the supreme importance of avoiding any leakage, especially he said to the Germans or Italians, and he hoped that in my report to Washington no risk would be incurred of my telegram being read by others. I said that the telegram would be sent in a code which I hoped and believed was unbreakable. I said that so far as I was concerned the only persons who would be informed of the proposal would be Mr. Dooman and my confidential secretary, Miss Arnold, who would transcribe the conversation. The Minister seemed to be entirely satisfied with these assurances.

The Minister commenced by stating that this was to be a long and strictly confidential talk on a very important matter in which he asked for my cooperation. He said that he would speak to me frankly as a naval officer and not as a career diplomat. I replied that I myself had no use for Old World diplomacy and was accustomed to speaking also with the utmost frankness and straight from the shoulder.

1. The stationing of Japanese forces in Indochina, resulting from the protocol for the joint defence of Indochina, was a peaceful and protective step taken for the purpose of solving the China affair. It was an independent step taken on Japan's own initiative and no German or any other pressure had been exerted.

2. In spite of the foregoing assurances conveyed to me and also to Admiral Nomura, the United States had assumed that this was the exercise of armed force at the instigation of Germany and had taken an economic step which had brought our countries very near to a complete severance of economic relations and had left a big black spot on the long history of peaceful relations between the United States and Japan.

3. The Japanese people, said the Minister, share his opinion and public opinion has become extremely excited but the Government has done all in its power to repress this excitement by prohibiting posters, public gatherings and hostile press comment.

4. The reply of the Japanese Government to the President's proposal of July 24, was sent immediately to Washington and when Secretary Hull returned to Washington on August 6 Ambassador Nomura had handed him the reply. This reply had been drafted after careful and complete study and with a view to meeting as far as possible the intentions of the American Government.

5. The Japanese reply contains important proposals which would bind both governments: Japanese forces in Indochina would be immediately withdrawn when the China affair is settled; it contains three points binding each party.

6. Nevertheless the President's proposal was an independent one dealing exclusively with the joint defence measure of Indochina. The Japanese reply was also accordingly restricted to that subject and was to be dealt with independently of the general adjustment of relations which had been discussed between Secretary Hull and Admiral Nomura.

7. On August 8 Admiral Nomura had received from Secretary Hull the American reply to the Japanese proposal reiterating the substance of the President's proposal of July 24 and Admiral Toyoda regretted that the American reply seemed to attach too little importance to the profound consideration given by the Japanese Government to the President's proposal.

8. In other words, the American proposal, it seems, suggested the withdrawal of Japanese forces from Indochina as a prerequisite although the Japanese Government had definitely affirmed its intention to withdraw immediately after the China affair had been settled because the China affair is the obstacle to peace in the Far East.

9. If the United States really desires peace in the Far East the Japanese Government hopes that it will give full consideration to the Japanese Government's declaration and will cooperate for the settlement of the China affair which is the obstacle to peace in the Far East.

10. As the Ambassador is fully aware, both the present and the last cabinet of Prince Konoye have had the sincerest wish to adjust relations with the United States and it is the Minister's firm conviction that there is no room for doubt that this wish has been equally shared by President Roosevelt and Secretary Hull.

11. ~~Admiral Toyoda says this because the breakdown of peace between our countries which has long been cherished and the accomplishment of cordial friendship between both peoples would itself be an extremely miserable matter, and not only that but because both Japan and the United States which are the last two countries which hold the key for maintaining world peace in their hands under the present world situation would proceed to the worst situation without showing statesmanship; that would leave the greatest black spot on human history and would be nothing but making future historians unable to understand the nature of the breakdown, and lastly because allowing the situation to come to that pass would mean that we as statesmen had not fully fulfilled our responsibility for the benefit of both peoples.~~

12. The Minister believes that both Japan and the United States must do their duty as saviours of the world in the present crisis, and for that purpose the problems lying between the two countries must be considered in a calm and friendly atmosphere on an equal basis as between two great powers facing the Pacific Ocean; the Minister further believes that it would be possible to come to an adjustment of relations between both countries in that spirit.

13. The Minister cannot but recognize the fact that in spite of the points just mentioned the present relations between the United States and Japan have become extremely strained as a result of misunderstanding between the two countries and sinister designs by third powers, and that if the situation should be left without trying to prevent it from getting worse it would lead to a most critical situation.

14. The only way to eliminate this critical situation is, the Minister thinks, that the responsible people of both countries should directly meet each other and express their true intentions toward each other and thus to study the possibility of remedying the present situation, trying to discover the methods for contributing toward mankind and the peace of the world.

15. In other words, the Minister thinks that it would be most opportune if the leaders of both countries, animated by the above mentioned desires, could have talks most frankly in order to dispose of American-Japanese relations in the aforesaid spirit and also from a broadminded point of view, and in view of his conviction that it would be highly desirable that Prince Konoye should proceed to Honolulu and have talks personally with President Roosevelt if the President would consent to this suggestion, the Minister sent an instruction on August 7 to Ambassador Nomura about this matter. He intended that Admiral Nomura should personally see President Roosevelt on his return to Washington.

16. According to news reports the President returned to Washington yesterday. In view of the seriousness of the matter the Minister desired to make this statement to me on this suggestion and he wished to ask for my cooperation towards the realization of this proposal.

17. The Minister firmly believed that I would give him my cooperation with the more sincerity and vigor in order to make this plan succeed when he remembers my ever continuing sincere effort for the improvement of American-Japanese friendly relations during the past nine long years.

18. Needless to say the Premier's going abroad would have no precedent in Japanese history and the Prime Minister, Prince Konoye, has made up his mind with an extremely strong determination to meet the President notwithstanding the fact that he is fully aware of the objections in certain parts of this country. This determination of Prince Konoye is nothing but the expression of his strongest desire to save the civilization of the world from ruin as well as to maintain peace in the Pacific by making every effort in his power, and the Minister firmly believes that the President will also be in harmony with this thought and will give his consent to the proposal of the Japanese Government.

19. It is firmly believed that in the conversations between the Prime Minister and the President it will be possible to reach a just and equitable agreement on the general question of Japanese-American relations from the broadminded point of view as a result of the expressions of the highest degree of statesmanship of both leaders, Japan not being necessarily bound by her reply to the President's proposal of July 24 made through Admiral Nomura on August 6 and in this connection the Minister wishes to call my attention to the fact that it is absolutely necessary to avoid arousing misunderstanding or giving an impression both inside and outside this country that the Japanese Government has entered into negotiation with the American Government as a result of American pressure. Based upon this point of view the Minister deems it desirable that various measures of economic pressure against Japan be immediately stopped or highly moderated and the Japanese Government is of course ready to reciprocate at once in this respect. The Minister wishes to draw the attention of the American Government to this point.

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20. The foregoing is the substance of the highly serious and absolutely secret proposal for which the Minister especially asked me to visit him today. In view of its importance and delicate nature he does not need to ask me to keep this only to myself as it is not difficult to imagine what would occur if it should leak out. This is the reason why he has so far been instructing only Admiral Nomura to discuss and to dispose of the matter in the United States, but in order to make this proposal realized he has most frankly expressed his opinion to me so that he may have my helpful cooperation and, if there should be any question concerning this proposal he will be very glad to talk it over with me.

In the early part of the Minister's oral statement, before he had come to the proposed meeting in Honolulu, I spoke of Japan's progressive southward advance and the fact that in spite of all peaceful assurances the American Government, in the light of the steps taken by Japan, could only be guided by facts and actions and not by words. I noted also the fact that whereas in previous conversation the Minister had ascribed the Japanese move into Indochina as brought about by the threatened encirclement by other powers including the United States and Great Britain he now ascribed it exclusively to the settling of the China affair. To these comments the Minister made no reply.

I furthermore repeated to him the statement which the Under Secretary had made to the Japanese Ambassador on July 23 to the effect that Mr. Hull could not see that any basis was now offered for continuing the conversations which had been carried on in Washington between the Secretary and Admiral Nomura and I also spoke of Mr. Hull's statement to Admiral Nomura on August 8 to the effect that in the view of the American Government the proposal handed by the Japanese Ambassador to the Secretary of State on August 6 failed in responsiveness to the proposal advanced by the President on July 24.

At the end of his presentation I said that I would withhold comment until my Government had had an opportunity to study the proposal which the Minister had advanced but I said that in the interests of peace I would give the proposal my own personal support.

J[oseph] C. G[rew]