寄稿論文

The China Card: Sino-American Relations and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1933-1941

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There has been no shortage of explanations among American historians and writers for the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Charles Beard's *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941,* for example, singles out a duplicitous President Roosevelt for secretly maneuvering Japan into war, while more balanced studies, such as Herbert Feis' *The Road to Pearl Harbor*, focus on rigid American diplomacy and bureaucratic infighting. For many Americans, however, a disaster the magnitude of Pearl Harbor requires an explanation that focuses on American virtues rather than American shortcomings. And for this reason, postwar historiography is replete with works such as Paul Schroeder's *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations, 1941,*which argue that Pearl Harbor and the ensuing Pacific War resulted in large measure from the magnanimous American decision to defend China from predatory Japanese imperialism.

Just a decade after Bataan and Iwo Jima became part of the American lexicon, not to mention, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Schroeder explained that the last decade's bloodletting came about because America went to war to save China. He maintained that in the final run up to Pearl Harbor "American diplomats made it clear that the United States would accept war with Japan in preference to any settlement between Japan and China which did not restore intact China's territorial and administrative integrity." [1)]

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

Rather than magnanimity, war resulted in large measure from a United States strategy that sought to use China to contain Japanese expansion. From 1933 to 1939, the architects of American Far Eastern diplomacy maintained that determined Chinese resistance would eventually force Japan to abandon continental expansion and adhere to an American defined Open Door. With the outbreak of war in Europe, and especially once Japan joined the Axis in September of 1940, these same Americans reasoned that continued Sino-Japanese hostilities

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[1)] For studies singling out the president see Charles Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948) and Robert B. Stinnet, *Day of Deceit: The Truth About FDR and Pearl Harbor* (New York: Free Press, 1999). For examples of far more balanced studies see Abraham Ben Zvi, *The Illusion of Deterrence: The Roosevelt Presidency and the Origins of the Pacific War* (London: Westview Press, 1987), Herbert Feis, *The Road to Pearl Harbor* (New York: Atheneum, 1962) and Jonathan Utley, *Going to War with Japan, 1937-1941* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1985). For studies that argue that the United States refusal to abandon China brought on war see Nathaniel Peffer, *Far Eastern Survey* 15, no.6 (March 27, 1946): 81-83 and Paul Schroeder, *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations, 1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958).

would also protect vulnerable western colonies while negating Japan's contribution to the Axis. Finally, after Germany's June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, Chinese resistance became doubly important because it supposedly prevented Japan from striking Siberia.

In order for this policy to succeed, Sino-Japanese tensions had to remain elevated and at no time between 1933 and 1941 did the Roosevelt Administration work actively to promote improved Sino-Japanese relations. While American officials did not seek a Sino-Japanese War, neither did they welcome a Sino-Japanese understanding on Manchukuo or an end to the fighting after the summer of 1937. Success also required generous aid to Chiang and a parallel effort to weaken Japan. Taken together, aid for China and sanctions against Japan allowed China to maintain its resistance, but made war more likely in 1937 and peace all but impossible to maintain in 1941.

No Peace in China

In response to Japan's 1931 conquest of Manchuria and the establishment of Manchukuo the following year, the Roosevelt Administration embarked on an eight-year program designed to contain Japanese expansion, in part, by using China as Washington's Far Eastern cat's paw. In order to succeed, this policy required Sino-Japanese tensions to continue, and therefore the new administration quickly demonstrated its opposition to improved Sino-Japanese relations. Shortly after Roosevelt's inauguration, Alfred Sze, Nanking's minister in Washington, approached Stanley Hornbeck, chief of the State Department's Far Eastern Division, in order to solicit American help in improving Sino-Japanese relations. Hornbeck listened patiently, but soon after the meeting ended he promptly informed Cordell Hull, the new secretary of state, that Washington must not help Tokyo and Nanking mend fences. Any American initiative, he explained, "would...re-invigorate Japanese animus against this country," and successful negotiations were bound to create a lasting bitterness "on the part both of the Japanese and of the Chinese (in general) towards us." He predicted that negotiations would likely fail, but argued that the United States had far more to fear from successful talks. Japan, Hornbeck noted, had long demanded negotiations with China and their success could only mean "a capitulation on the part of China in terms of recognition of the new *status quo* in Manchuria and a pledge to refrain from any further efforts to upset that *status quo*." Ever suspicious of Japanese diplomacy, he maintained that China's capitulation would allow "the Japanese to consolidate their position on the Continent and prepare for their next move (either further coercion of China or conflict with Russia or conflict with the United States)." In effect, Hornbeck began to enunciate the theme which eight years later, still governed the ill-fated Hull-Nomura discussions of August-November 1941. To wit, a Sino-Japanese peace would serve neither Chinese nor American interests, but rather would act as a springboard to further Japanese aggression and conquest.[2)]

[2)] *Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers,* President's Secretary's File 26, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, Hornbeck Memorandum, May 9, 1933.

If Hornbeck opposed direct Sino-Japanese negotiations what were the alternatives? "Better," he reasoned, "that the situation between Japan and China remain fluid, even though it mean further suffering for the time being for the Chinese and a continuation of uncertainty and apprehension by and on behalf of foreign nationals in China and foreign powers in general." In time, Hornbeck argued, "the flood tide of her invasion will reach its height and the ebb will follow," but in the meantime, "our interests would be best served by a complete exposure of Japan's program, her strength and/or weakness, and as complete as possible involvement of herself in the situation which she has created and is developing there." He recognized that his was "not a humanitarian view," but, given Hornbeck's belief that Japan's ultimate aim was to dominate China, few other options existed.[3)]

American Aid for China

The logical extension of Hornbeck's position—use China to wear Japan down and force Tokyo to abandon foreign expansion—immediately led the Roosevelt Administration to embark on an ambitious program to provide Nanking the tools to resist Japan. In the spring of 1933, Washington provided President Chiang Kai-shek a $50 million credit to purchase American cotton, wheat, and flour. Officially designed as a recovery measure to sell off America's burgeoning agricultural surplus, the credit also represented an early attempt to strengthen both China and the Nationalist regime. During Roosevelt's first twenty months in office, Washington also approved export licenses for some $6 million in military hardware to Nanking versus less than one-half million dollars in 1932, the peak year of the Far Eastern crisis.[4)]

Washington accelerated its aid program the following year largely as a result of the 1934 US Silver Purchase Act, which required the government to buy silver until the metal formed a quarter of the nation's specie reserve or until its price doubled to $1.29 per ounce. While the measure's supporters argued that the legislation would provide China a sizeable dollar cache that would further facilitate American exports, heavy American purchases instead produced a highly unstable silver market where Chinese exporters executed a contract but found that in the interval between export and arrival, the rising price of silver decimated their profit margin. Moreover, rather than act as an inflationary catalyst, American silver purchases gave China unwanted firsthand experience with severe deflation. American legislation authorized the purchase of foreign silver so far above its nominal monetary value that Chinese citizens gladly sold their silver money for its higher commodity value. China's money supply quite literally began to melt down by late 1934 and as the ensuing deflation gutted the Chinese

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3) Ibid.

4) Ibid, PSF 42. Hornbeck Precis "Russo-Japanese Conflict," February 2, 1934; Dorothy Borg, *The US and the Far Eastern Crisis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 62-63; *Roosevelt Papers*, PSF 26, Far Eastern Division Memorandum, August 2, 1933; *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1934, 3, 516-518, Far Eastern Division Memorandum, October 25, 1934.

economy and weakened the Nationalist government, a chagrined Henry Morgenthau, Roosevelt's secretary of the treasury, told William Bullitt, the president's envoy to the Kremlin, that he felt like a Japanese agent.[5)]

Morgenthau quickly moved to support China, however, and in November 1935, after Peking dropped silver in favor of a paper currency, the United States made regular purchases of China's now superfluous silver. By this time, Morgenthau's department had become deeply involved in studying Chinese political affairs and directing American Far Eastern diplomacy. That spring, for example, a close Morgenthau aide, Harry Dexter White, armed his boss with a detailed, 44-page study on the situation in China. White's report warned of increasing Japanese control over large parts of China and predicted that Sino-Japanese economic "cooperation" would lead to the end of the Open Door and ever-greater Japanese assaults on Chinese sovereignty. White went on to note that ever greater American aid "would indicate to Japan that the United States is not wholly unconcerned in her expansion program in Asia," and "would encourage China and possibly cause Japan to proceed more warily in her attempt to swallow China." White argued that the United States should purchase Chinese silver "at as favorable a rate as possible," and predicted that such a move would afford the Nationalists "enhanced prestige at home, and...somewhat increased political strength in her relations with Japan and England."[6)]

Despite continued purchases of Chinese silver, Washington's ambitious aid program did not, as White had hoped, "cause Japan to proceed more warily in her attempt to swallow China." Instead, in July 1937, a skirmish between Japanese and Chinese forces near the Marco-Polo Bridge on the outskirts of Peking quickly developed into full-scale war. With the renewal of large-scale hostilities, the Treasury Department once again took the lead in extending aid to Chiang. In November 1937, officials agreed to an immediate purchase of an additional 20,000,000 ounces of Chinese silver, and in December, with Roosevelt and State's consent, Morgenthau purchased another 50,000,000 ounces. Massive American purchases of Chinese silver continued in 1938 without any stipulation that proceeds go solely to currency stabilization. Chiang now could spend the considerable proceeds from Washington's thinly disguised aid program for military hardware. And the proceeds were indeed considerable. In March, May, and again in June, Treasury made additional 50,000,000-ounce purchases. During 1937 and 1938 alone, American purchases of Chinese silver boosted the Nationalist war chest by nearly $175,000,000. When China ran out of silver Morgenthau secured a $20

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5) Allan Seymore Everest, *Morgenthau, the New Deal and Silver* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1950), 31-45, 102-106; John Morton Blum, *Roosevelt and Morgenthau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 93-94; *Henry Morgenthau Diary,* Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York, Book 2, pages 338-343.

6) Everest, 113-117; Blum, *Roosevelt and Morgenthau*, 104-107; *Harry Dexter White Papers*, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, Box 1, Folder 3 A, White to Morgenthau, April 9, 1936. Another copy of White's study (in book 20 A of the Morgenthau Diary) lists George Haas, rather than Harry White as sender and/or author of the memorandum.

million tin credit and a $25 million tung oil purchase credit which future Secretary of War Henry Stimson claimed would serve as “a discouragement to the military faction which now controls Japan.”[7)]

In his determination to ensure that nothing interfered with China’s war effort, Morgenthau quickly became not only China’s main American fundraiser but its transportation manager as well. By 1938, the Japanese Navy had all but bottled up the Chinese coast, leaving only overland routes along China’s border with Hong Kong, French-Indochina, Burma, and portions of the Soviet Union open to imports. Anxious to maximize these openings, Morgenthau arranged for the California-Texas Oil Company, among others, to help China purchase tanker trucks “as near cost as possible” in order to facilitate the transport of oil from Rangoon. But trucks were not enough. China also needed a dependable road network and in July 1939, the secretary happily informed Chiang that “after a very thorough search throughout the United States,” he had selected three transportation experts to assist the Nationalists in finishing the Burma Road. In conjunction with the dispatch of the transportation experts, Morgenthau also arranged, through the Surgeon General’s Office, to dispatch an anti-malarial team to the construction zone in order to combat a deadly epidemic that threatened road building.[8)]

By mid-September 1940, with Japan taking full advantage of German victories in Europe to pressure France and England to close their overland links to southern China, the administration felt compelled to enlarge its Chinese aid program. With Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s full concurrence, the Export-Import Bank agreed to a $20,000,000 loan for Chunking and the Metals Reserve Company agreed to purchase $30,000,000 worth of Chinese tungsten. Just two months later, following Tokyo’s decision to recognize formally Wang Ching-wei’s puppet government at Nanking, Washington granted Chiang a mammoth $100,000,000 loan. While the United States generously aided the Chinese war effort in order to keep Chinese forces in the field, it made no parallel effort to lend its good offices to help end the fighting.[9)]

The Road Not Taken, Summer 1939

The first opportunity to help mediate an end to the war came in mid-1939 after continued Chinese resistance had shaken the confidence of the Japanese government and the army.

[7)] Everest, 120-121; See also 118, table 4, appendix; *Morgenthau Diary,* 153/366-369; Ibid., 158/223-224. See also John Morton Blum, *From the Morgenthau Dairies, Years of Urgency, 1938-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 58-63.

[8)] *Morgenthau Diary,* 144/306; Ibid., 205/94-95; *Roosevelt Papers*, OF 150, Box 2, File, “China 1939-1940,” McNutt to Roosevelt, September 29, 1939. See also *Morgenthau Diary,* 206/79.

[9)] *FRUS* 1939, 3, 550-555, Memorandum by Hornbeck and the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, December 29, 1939; *FRUS,* 1940, 4, 645-646, Memorandum of Hornbeck-Morgenthau Conversation, March 6, 1940; Ibid., 651, Hornbeck to Morgenthau, April 11, 1940.

From the conflict's outset in July 1937, the war had divided the army with one faction calling for caution and a second urging escalation. As Europe inched forward to catastrophe and the Imperial Army marched deeper into a seemingly endless Chinese interior, members of both the Army General Staff and the Army Ministry called for a negotiated end to the war.[10)]

In Washington, meanwhile, Hornbeck's long ago prophecy that Japan's invasion would reach flood stage and then recede seemed possible at last. The influential American Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations concluded the previous December that China would continue "resistance over a long period" and "keep large bodies of Japanese troops in the field, thereby increasing Japan's war costs." From Chungking, Ambassador Nelson Johnson informed the president that China could continue to resist indefinitely with adequate financial help and a parallel effort at cutting Japan's flow of foreign financial assistance.[11)]

Still, in the summer of 1939 others close to the president believed that the time had come to use American power to end rather than prolong the war. William Bullitt informed Hull that Washington should approach Chiang and sound him out regarding his government's peace terms. In the final hours of Europe's fragile peace, he boldly suggested bringing Japan into the Anglo-French orbit. On August 26, Bullitt notified the secretary that the Polish Ambassador had assured him that Japan sought American help in ending the war and that given the warm relations between Warsaw and Tokyo, Japan was in all likelihood using the Poles as a conduit. An arch foe of the Soviets, Bullitt no doubt saw Japan as bulwark against Russian expansion in the Far East and as such, one must view his plea for an Anglo-French-Japanese entente with some suspicion. On the other hand, many sources indicated that the announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Pact combined with the disasters at Nomonhan signaled a groundbreaking opportunity to approach Tokyo and Chungking. From Teheran, the chargé reported that the Japanese minister assured him that the Nazi-Soviet Pact had gutted the military party. From Peking, the embassy's counselor informed Hull that in light of the Soviet-German agreement, Tokyo probably now sought an end to the war. Finally, on September 1, as German troops streamed across the Polish frontier, Eugene Dooman, the counselor at the American embassy in Tokyo, cabled Hull the startling news that the new prime minister, Nobuyuki Abe, disclosed to the press that his government would not rule out

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10) For army division see Ikuhiko Hata, "The Marco Polo Bridge Incident," in James Morley ed., *The China Quagmire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 254-255; Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869-1942* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 222; Mark R Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 294-301. For General Staff and Ministry interest in ending the war, see Chihiro Hosoya, "The Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact," in James Morley ed., *Deterrent Diplomacy*: *Japan, Germany and the USSR, 1935-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 32.

11) *Brooks Emeny Papers,* Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, Box 19, Confidential Report "Problems of American Far Eastern Policy," December 3-4, 1938; *Roosevelt Papers,* PSF 27, Diplomatic Correspondence, China, 1939-1940, Johnson to Roosevelt, February 27, 1939.

cooperating with foreign powers to end the China Incident.[12)]

After two years of war, it also seemed that China was willing to explore a negotiated settlement. Just hours before Dooman sent his encouraging telegram, Bullitt informed the president that Chiang also favored a conference to end the fighting. According to the Chinese ambassador, Chiang favored a settlement that would roll Japan back to the position it occupied prior to its 1937 occupation of Teintsin but would not require Japan to withdraw completely from North China. Chiang's peace plan does not appear to have been a flight of fancy for several weeks earlier the Chinese Foreign Ministry informed its London and Washington embassies that the time had come for Anglo-American mediation. As war clouds broke over Europe, Tokyo and Chungking signaled that they desired an end to the war. Washington, however, did not.[13)]

On August 26, Hornbeck wrote a long memorandum explaining that he agreed with Bullitt's analysis regarding the Polish ambassador's information. Tokyo was using Warsaw as a conduit. On all other counts, he noted, Bullitt was dead wrong. "The moment has not yet arrived," he argued, "for any effort by the American Government, whether in association with the British and the French and/or other governments or by itself, to become involved in efforts 'for the termination of the war between China and Japan.'" Any compromise peace, he contended, would be forced on China and would constitute a Far Eastern Munich. Whether or not Chiang was willing to recognize Manchukuo in order to end hostilities was irrelevant, for Hornbeck was not. Unlike Britain and France, he noted, "[w]e are not immediately menaced as regards territory, either overseas or at home." Here was the nub and for Hornbeck it remained so until the first news flashes from Pearl Harbor. Japan did not directly threaten the United States and never would go to war against America so why make a compromise peace that entailed "a sacrificing of principles" and a "betrayal of China?" Paraphrasing a fiery note from Admiral Harry Yarnell, Hornbeck told Hull that rather than compromise, "every support should be given the Chinese government to enable it to continue the war."[14)]

Hornbeck's analysis of why Washington should reject any role in mediating an end

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12) Ibid., PSF 27, Diplomatic Correspondence, China, 1939-1940, Bullitt to Roosevelt, August 28, 1939; *FRUS,* 1939, 3, 210-211, Bullitt to Hull, August 26, 1939; *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series D (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1954), 237-238, Ott to Weizsacker, October 7, 1939. Ott argued that the time was not right for mediation. His telegram also notes that Army influence has declined as a result of Nomonhan and the Nazi-Soviet Pact. *FRUS*, 1939, 3, 213-214, Engert to Hull, August 28, 1939; Ibid., 214-215, Lockhart to Hull, August 28, 1939; Ibid, 223-224, Dooman to Hull, September 1, 1939.

13) Ibid., 221-223, Bullitt to Hull, September 1, 1939; *Wellington Koo Papers,* Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, Box 26, Folder "Attempts at Mediation between China and Japan, 1933-1938," Waichiapu to London Embassy, August 2, 1938; *German Documents*, D, 8, 220-222, Memorandum of Knoll-Ting Conversation, October 5, 1939.

14) *FRUS,* 1939, 3, 211-212, Hornbeck Memorandum, August 26, 1939; Ibid., 250-251, Hornbeck to Hull, September 16, 1939.

to the Sino-Japanese War tells only a part of the reasoning behind the American decision. Chiang had survived the loss of most of China's coastal cities, the fall of Nanking, and the defection of Wang Ching-wei, the former leader of the Nationalist Party, and his forces continued to resist. China, in short, showed no sign of imminent collapse. The State Department, meanwhile, already had begun economic sanctions and Congress passed a second naval expansion bill. The coming year promised unparalleled opportunities to flatten the Japanese economy between the hammer of American economic deterrence and the twin anvils of a naval arms race and continued war in China. Conversely, had China hovered on the brink of collapse or had Congress and the public showed no willingness to support administration initiatives, the State Department may well have moved to salvage something from the wreckage. But in the autumn of 1939 Washington possessed a strong hand. For Hornbeck, Hull, and others, this was not the time to allow Japan to escape its predicament.

It is worth noting, moreover, that Washington was not alone in believing that Sino-Japanese hostilities protected national interests. The British military chiefs, for example, agreed with Hornbeck's thesis that continued fighting in China protected the west's Asian possessions. Germany, likewise, decided against mediating an end to the fighting in China at the same time as Washington, and for almost identical reasons. In early October, Hornbeck's opposite number in Berlin convinced Foreign Secretary Ernst von Weizsacker not to mediate in part because "there is a possibility that in the course of a long German-British-French war Japan might" support the Allies. Therefore, he noted, "it would be to our interests for Japan to continue to tie up her forces in China."[15)]

American economic and military aid, coupled with Washington's refusal to lend good offices, no doubt lengthened the war in China, but if Washington hoped to block further Japanese expansion in Asia by supporting Chiang, then playing the China card proved an abject failure. During 1940 and 1941, successive Japanese cabinets, desperate to end the war, supported expansion into Southeast Asia and a formal alliance with Nazi Germany.

Southern Expansion and the Axis Alliance

For the better part of two years, Tokyo had pressured Paris to close the overland link between China and French Indochina, but the French government refused. Immediately after France's capitulation to Germany, however, Vichy authorities complied with Japanese demands, closed the supply route to China, and allowed Tokyo to dispatch monitors to ensure compliance. Two months later, Tokyo followed up its triumph by obtaining Vichy's consent to station troops and establish air bases in northern Indochina. Tokyo's drive south clearly shows Japanese policy at its most opportunistic, but one should not equate opportunism with aggression in this instance. France could not resist Japanese demands and Prime

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15) For British agreement with the Hornbeck thesis regarding the desirability of continued hostilities in China see Paul Haggie, *Britannia at Bay: The Defense of the British Empire Against Japan, 1931-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 164; *German Documents*, D, 8, 243, Woermann to Weizsacker, October 8, 1941.

Minister Fumimaro Konoe had no compunction about using the German victory in Europe to further the establishment of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. The government, however, limited its demands both in terms of the absolute number of troops it dispatched as well as the area where it based its forces. The scope of the Japanese occupation was, on the whole, far more consistent with an effort to end the war in China rather than absorb northern French Indochina. Tokyo deployed its air force to strike supplies flowing over the Burma Road while Japanese troops in the north would, if necessary, form the vanguard for an overland attack against Kunming.[16)]

The same drive to end the war in China that led Japan to occupy northern Indochina, also contributed to Tokyo's decision to embrace Germany, albeit it warily. To be sure, as with northern Indochina, a good deal of opportunism as well as basic insecurity motivated Japan to join the Axis in September 1940. Once again, however, the specter of an endless war in China loomed large. During a critical cabinet debate held on September 16, Finance Minister Isao Kawada and Chief of the Cabinet Planning Board Naoki Hoshino supported joining the Axis because, as they told their fellow ministers, with "this pact, we may be able to settle the China Incident." Three days later at a September 19 Imperial Conference, Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka assured Army Chief of Staff Prince Kan'in that an alliance with Germany would help end the war in China. Matsuoka explained that if, as he hoped, Germany cooperated in the current peace negotiations, then Japan could "anticipate considerable results." No less an influential conservative than Yoshimichi Hara, president of the Privy Council and a senior advisor to the emperor, backed the pact with Germany at least in part out of a conviction that an alliance was "essential to carry on the China Incident."[17)]

Membership in the Axis, however, did not facilitate an end to the war in China. Nearly a year later, and with no end in sight to the fighting, Japan occupied the remainder of French Indochina. Once again, concern over ending the China Incident figured prominently. In explaining his decision to support the move south, Army Chief of Staff Gen Sugiyama argued, "that in order to hasten the settlement of the Incident it will be absolutely necessary for our Empire to increase its direct pressure on the Chunking regime." Sugiyama saw that the occupation would put additional pressure on Chiang, "and at the same time [the] move southward... [would] sever the links between the Chunking regime and the British and American powers, which support it from behind and

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16) Rear Admiral Sadatoshi Tomioka, Japanese Monograph #146 in Donald S. Detwiler and Charles Burton Burdick eds., *War in Asia and the Pacific,* vol. 2 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980), 8-9. In June 1940, nearly half of all overseas aid to China came over the French Indochina route. See Ikuhiko Hata, "Army's Move Into Northern Indochina," in James Morley ed., *The Fateful Choice*: *Japan's Advance into Southeast Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 157.

17) Chihiro Hosoya, "The Tripartite Pact," in James Morley ed., *Deterrent Diplomacy,* 242-243; Nobutaka Ike*, Japans' Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), 4-5, 13, Imperial Conference, September 19, 1940.

strengthen its will to resist."[18)]

Washington's policy of supporting China in order to tie down large numbers of Japanese forces succeeded in prolonging Chinese resistance, but the cost proved too high and the benefits far too meager. Tokyo might well have moved against the French and sided with Germany, but the fact remains that on multiple occasions Japanese statesman chose disastrous policies and in each instance justified their decisions, in part, as necessary to end the fighting in China. Neither the Axis Alliance nor the occupation of French Indochina brought Japan security or an end to the war in China. By the same token, however, continued hostilities in China did nothing to enhance Anglo-American-Dutch security in Asia and the Pacific. In the winter of 1941-42, the bulk of Japan's military remained mired in China, but by spring the Rising Sun flag flew over nearly every western outpost in Asia. Rather than protecting America and her erstwhile allies, the war in China contributed to the onset of the Pacific War and the staggering western defeats that followed.

The Revolutionary Summer of 1941

Aid to China, however important, was never Washington's sole means for containing Tokyo and Japan's considerable dependence on overseas raw materials and finished goods led the Roosevelt Administration to adopt gradual economic restrictions beginning in the summer of 1938. Starting with the moral embargo, in which the administration pressured aircraft manufacturers, banks, and others from doing business with Japan, Washington next moved to preclusively purchase raw materials through its program of strategic stockpiling. With the July 1940 Export Control Act, the United States required export licenses for strategic raw materials and finished goods which were routinely denied to Japan. By the spring of 1941, preclusive purchasing and export control meant that Tokyo found itself cut off from nearly all vital imports, save cotton and crude oil.

The move to sever what little trade remained unmistakably accelerated after the June 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union. On June 25, Hornbeck passed along to his superiors a memorandum by Alger Hiss that stressed that the German attack on Russia "increases the importance of our aid to China." Hiss contended that the severity of the German strike would soon force Moscow to scale back its aid to Chiang leaving America "the only power in a position to supply effective aid to China." In the summer of 1941, Hornbeck and Hiss were not alone in calling for a redoubling of American efforts to save China. The Nazi drive against Russia, for example, spurred Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles to urge Harry Hopkins, arguably the president's closest aid and a man sympathetic to China's plight, to do all he could to increase American support for Chiang. Welles explained that he was concerned about Chinese morale and believed that increased aid would boost the Nationalists' sagging spirits. Where Welles hoped to help Chiang by increased succor, however, Hornbeck and Hiss believed that Washington could not rapidly increase the

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[18)] Ibid., 80-81, Imperial Conference, July 2, 1941.

delivery of supplies. If the United States could not expand its material support, how could it support Chiang? Hiss believed that he had the answer—freeze Japanese assets and apply a sweeping oil embargo.[19)]

Any doubt that the Roosevelt Administration enacted the embargo in order to assist China is clearly dispelled by the compelling arguments that Hiss relentlessly pressed upon his superiors. Washington could, he urged, "immediately and substantially…assist China's morale by taking action adverse to Japan's economic situation." Many of the reasons for hesitating to enact greater restrictions on oil no longer existed, he argued, and others "appear to be less compelling today than they were before Germany's attack on Russia." In addition to boosting Chinese morale, he continued, there were a number of other reasons for freezing Japanese assets. Congressional and public support for greater restrictions were building, and by freezing Japanese assets Washington would make the existing freeze on German and Italian funds fully effective. Hiss, like many of his counterparts in the diplomatic corps, and in the military for that matter, believed that Tokyo would likely await the outcome of the campaign in Russia before striking south, thus minimizing the risks associated with a freezing order. Hiss concluded that the time had arrived for the Department to implement the "draft directive, which was prepared some time ago, which provides for increased restrictions on the export of petroleum products to Japan" and to simultaneously freeze Japanese assets. Further delay, he argued in closing, would only make it more difficult to pursue these options.[20)]

As if to test Hiss' contention that Japan would not react violently to increased sanctions, Washington relentlessly increased its economic pressure on Japan in the weeks leading up to the embargo. On June 20, the president ordered an end to petroleum exports from the Atlantic coast and on July 11, Panama Canal authorities notified shippers that repairs required closing the canal, or at the very least, curtailing its use for the immediate future. This announcement was a charade, however, as repairs only delayed Japanese vessels. By this time, the State Department had also taken the extraordinary decision to refuse, for the time being, any new export licenses for gasoline and crude oil to Japan.[21)]

[19)] *Hornbeck Papers,* Box 52, Folder, China Assistance, 1939-1941, Hiss Memorandum, June 25, 1941; National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC, *War Plans Division 4389-7,* Welles to Hopkins, July 7, 1941.

[20)] *Hornbeck Papers*, Box 52, Folder, China Assistance, 1939-1941, Hiss Memorandum, June 25, 1941.

[21)] Alan P. Dobson, *U.S. Economic Statecraft for Survival, 1933-1991: Of Sanctions, Embargoes and Economic Warfare* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 42; *Welles Papers*, Box 165, Folder 5, Japan 1938-1941, Memorandum of Welles-Nomura Conversation, July 18, 1941; Irvine Anderson, *The Standard-Vacuum Oil Company and United States East Asian Policy, 1933-1941* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 159-168. In the weeks prior to the occupation of southern French-Indochina, Britain also moved inexorably to increase sanctions. On July 7, for example, the cabinet approved a proposal to increase sanctions "even in the absence of further provocation by that country." Nicholas Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Pacific War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 320.

The combined effect of two years of growing economic restrictions, including the most recent decisions on petroleum exports and the Panama Canal meant that by mid-July the United States had all but run out of interim steps. If Washington sought to bolster Chinese resistance by hampering the Japanese war effort, it had but one option left and in the final week of July, following the Japanese decision to occupy the remainder of Indochina, the Roosevelt Administration froze Japanese assets, bringing all remaining Japanese-American trade to a halt.

There is little debate among historians on either side of the Pacific that the July freezing order and subsequent western trade embargoes led to war in the Pacific within six months. Neither the Manchurian crisis, nor the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, nor the occupation of French Indochina, nor the signing of the Tripartite Pact, nor even the clash between the Open Door and Japan's Monroe Doctrine for Asia led to war. But, in the ultimate step to support continued Chinese resistance, Washington brought on the war it had studiously labored to avoid. Denied access to critical raw materials and facing a physical collapse, Japan gambled all on a desperate war. Worse still, during the final months of peace, continued support for China undercut 11th hour Japanese and American attempts to avoid war.

The Rush to War, August to December 1941

During the final months leading to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese diplomats attempted to fashion a compromise to avoid war, but neither time nor American diplomacy were on their side. After July 26, pressure for a war against the United States increased dramatically. Faced with a near complete, worldwide trade embargo, Chief of the Imperial Navy's General Staff, Admiral Osami Nagano told the emperor that Japan had "no choice but to come out fighting." Even the somewhat cooler heads at the Cabinet Planning Board recognized that the time for decision had arrived. Three days after Washington announced the freeze, it concluded:

> Should present conditions continue, the Empire will shortly become impoverished and unable to hold its own. In other words the Empire stands at the point of no return and must make a final decision, immediately and without hesitation.[22)]

While the embargo complicated diplomacy by forcing diplomats to conclude an agreement quickly, before Japan exhausted its oil reserves, it also acted as a catalyst that soon produced extraordinary results. On August 4, Konoe approached War Minister Hideki Tojo and Navy Minister Koshiro Oikawa in order to secure their support for a plan to meet President Roosevelt and within a day he had it. In the event that the summit failed, which Tojo thought likely, the war minister demanded that Konoe lead Japan to war. The following day, Chief of the Army General Staff Sugiyama also approved the prime minister's

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[22)] James Morley, ed., *Final Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 159-161; *Pearl Harbor*, 18-20, 3999, Konoe Memoirs; WPD 4510, Strategic Estimate, October 1941; For Nagano's admission to the emperor, see Butow, *Tojo,* 234.

plan, and two days later, having also secured the emperor's support, Konoe quickly cabled Nomura to "sound out the American side immediately" as to the possibility of a meeting with Roosevelt.[23)]

Unfortunately for Konoe and Nomura, the most important member of the "American side" had just left Washington for his secret rendezvous with Winston Churchill at Placentia Bay, off the coast of Newfoundland. Cordell Hull, who opposed the summit, could have forwarded the Japanese proposal to the president, but did not and, consequently, during the course of his meetings with Churchill, Roosevelt knew nothing of Japan's latest diplomatic efforts.[24)]

Hull withheld information and opposed the summit because he knew that it could produce an understanding that would prove publicly unpopular and potentially crippling to Chinese morale. Worse still, Hull feared that Roosevelt might secure a substantial Japanese withdrawal from China that would free Tokyo to strike north against the Soviets or south against the British and the Dutch. Alternatively, if the president and Konoe failed to reach an understanding, Tokyo's last hope would have vanished in which case Japan would have to act and, while action did not necessarily mean an assault on the United States, Britain, or Holland, Hull saw no reason to force an early decision. For all these reasons, it should come as no surprise that Hull and the president's other advisors greeted Konoe's summit plan with outright hostility.

While Konoe and Japanese diplomats worked to finalize plans for the summit, American negotiators used the promise of a meeting to drag out preliminary talks in order to further drain Japanese oil reserves and buy time for the deployment of men and materiel to the Philippines. Unable to inform his Japanese counterparts of this rather ugly truth, Hull played the China card and repeatedly informed Japanese negotiators that their proposals to end the fighting in China were unacceptable. Not until it was too late, did Konoe's inner circle realize that that "Japan had fallen into a trap" and that "the United States never had any intention of coming to any agreement with Japan."

Roosevelt's failure to meet Konoe was critical, for a leader's summit may well have averted the Pacific War. Eugene Dooman, for example, remained convinced until his death that a Konoe-Roosevelt summit could have prevented war. During a secret meeting at Baron Tokugawa's villa, Konoe explained that he would bring two generals and two admirals with him in order to assure the president of military support for the agreement. At the end of the meeting, Konoe also took Dooman aside and asked if he could share in total confidence certain facts that not even the United States ambassador, Joseph C. Grew, could be told. After some hesitation, Dooman agreed and Konoe informed him that Hirohito had approved a plan

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23) Morley, *Final Confrontation,* 179-181; See also *Pearl Harbor,* 18-20, 4000, Konoe Memoirs; Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 403.

24) Theodore A. Wilson, *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay, 1941* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1991), 32, 137, 207-208.

where the prime minister would "report by radio directly to the Emperor and request that his majesty order the withdrawal of our troops from China." Konoe explained that Hirohito could not become "involved before a definite agreement has been reached," but that he was "ready to take a decisive step."[25)]

It is impossible to confirm Dooman's contention that a summit could have prevented war in the Pacific and a substantial body of work contends that a Konoe-Roosevelt summit would have changed nothing. Robert J.C. Butow, for example, notes in his 1961 *Tojo and the Coming of the War* that military and Foreign Ministry opposition to Hull's Four Principles would in all likelihood have doomed a meeting. More recently, Herbert P. Bix's Pulitzer Prize winning *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* crystallized a generation of arguments supporting the "failed summit" thesis. While recognizing that Konoe was burdened with half-hearted support and a questionable character, Bix based his conclusion that a Roosevelt-Konoe summit was bound to fail on Japan's unwillingness to modify its ambitions in Asia, or what he termed, "Konoe's set of stale positions."[26)]

While the majority of historians discount the possibility of a successful summit, others, on both sides of the Pacific, compellingly argue that a meeting could have produced an agreement. Shigeharu Matsumoto, for example, noted at the "Conference on Japanese-American Relations, 1931-1941," held at Lake Kawaguchi in July of 1969, that the army and navy supported Konoe and that the prime minister "would not have minded watering down the Tripartite Pact and withdrawing troops from China." Jun Tsunoda, meanwhile, demonstrates that despite Konoe's failings, the prime minister had committed himself to diplomacy and that along with Foreign Minister Teijiro Toyoda he had secured the necessary support from both the high command and the throne, to ensure the summit's success. More recently, Seishiro Sugihara's critical study of Japanese foreign policymaking during the Pacific War, *Between Incompetence and Culpability: Assessing the Diplomacy of Japan's Foreign Ministry from Pearl Harbor to Potsdam*, makes a compelling case for a successful conference and lays the blame for the failed talks squarely on Hull's shoulders.[27)]

On the American side, historians Hilary Conroy and Norman Graebner persuasively argue in their contributions to the 1990 study *Pearl Harbor Reexamined: Prologue to the Pacific War*, that Washington should have pursued direct talks with Konoe. Conroy stresses

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[25)] *Eugene Dooman Papers*, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford California, Box 1, Oral History Interview, Dooman Oral History, 95.

[26)] Butow, *Tojo,* 260-261; Bix, *Hirohito*, 403-405.

[27)] Shigeharu Matsumoto's comments in "Conference on Japanese-American Relations, 1931-1941," Lake Kawaguchi Japan, July 14-18, 1969, compiled by Michael K. Blaker and Dale K. Anderson, unpublished proceedings in author's possession, 109; Jun Tsunoda, "On the So-Called Hull Nomura Negotiations," in Hilary Conroy and Harry Wray eds., *Pearl Harbor Reexamined: Prologue to the Pacific War* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 93; Seishiro Sugihara, *Between Incompetence and Culpability: Assessing the Diplomacy of Japan's Foreign Ministry from Pearl Harbor to Potsdam* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), 36.

that Konoe's decision to send Admiral Nomura to the United States, his decision to sack Matsuoka in July 1941, and his selection of the moderate Admiral Toyoda for foreign minister, clearly indicated the prime minister's sincerity. Graebner, meanwhile, persuasively argues that while Japanese terms remained difficult to countenance in September, under the cumulative effects of the embargoes, Konoe would have settled for less by October, thus increasing the likelihood of a successful summit.[28)]

Even with the Konoe Cabinet's fall in October of 1941, the possibility of averting war remained possible, if not probable. The Tojo Cabinet fashioned two agreements to avert war and while Washington quickly rejected the proposal for a comprehensive settlement that included an end to the fighting in China, Tokyo's proposed modus vivendi or temporary agreement, remained an attractive possibility. The president, however, understood that the architects of Washington's Chinese aid program, many staunch interventionists like himself, and China's leadership, opposed any agreement that might strengthen Japan. Henry Morgenthau, a long time Roosevelt confidant and leading interventionist, summed up his feelings and the presidents worst fear of what a modus vivendi might mean in a note that he never sent his friend:

> To sell China to her enemies for the thirty blood stained coins of gold will not only weaken our national policy in Europe as well as in the Far East, but will dim the bright lustre of America's world leadership in the great democratic fight against Fascism.[29)]

Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, a cabinet member since 1933, confided in his diary that he "would have promptly resigned from the Cabinet with a ringing statement attacking the arrangement and raising hell generally with the State Department and its policy of appeasement." While the president may not have known the depth of Ickes' feelings, he must surely have suspected. He must also have known that to act against Morgenthau and Ickes, two leading interventionists, may well have crippled his efforts to prepare the nation for war in Europe.[30)]

Chiang Kai-shek, meanwhile, fumed at talk of a last minute, albeit temporary Japanese-American agreement. Foreign Minister Quo-Tai-chi instructed his ambassador in Washington, Hu Shih, to tell Hull that he "firmly opposed …any measure which may have the effect of increasing China's difficulty in her war of resistance, or of strengthening Japan's power in her aggression against China." Owen Lattimore, President Roosevelt's personal representative to Chiang, expressed deeper concerns when he cabled Washington "that even

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[28)] Hilary Conroy, "Ambassador Nomura and His John Doe Associates: Pearl Harbor Diplomacy Revisited," in Conroy and Wray eds., *Pearl Harbor Reexamined,* 98, 102-103; Ibid., Norman A. Graebner, "Nomura in Washington: Conversations in Lieu of Diplomacy," 111-113.

[29)] *White Papers,* Box 6, Folder 16 A, Undated, unsigned, untitled letter. For a slightly different version of the same letter, see Blum, *Urgency*, 389-391.

[30)] Harold Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes*, 3, *The Lowering Clouds*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 655.

the Generalissimo questions his ability to hold the situation together if the Chinese national trust in America is undermined by reports of Japan's escaping military defeat by diplomatic victory.[31)]

In deciding to abandon the idea for a modus vivendi, Secretary of State Hull focused his ire on the Chinese. Hull lamented to the British ambassador to the United States, Lord Halifax, "that Chiang Kai-shek...has sent numerous hysterical cable messages to different Cabinet officers and high officials in the Government other than the State Department, and sometimes even ignoring the President." Chiang's brother-in-law, Hull complained, "disseminates[s] damaging reports at times to the press and others, apparently with no particular purpose in mind." Hull also complained to Dutch authorities how "the Chinese had exploded without knowing half the true facts or waiting to ascertain them."[32)]

Certain that a comprehensive peace settlement that included an end to the Sino-Japanese-War was inimitable to American interests and unable to move forward on the modus vivendi owing to the opposition of China and her supporters in the United States, Hull decided "to kick the whole thing over." On November 26, he made public the details of his recent talks with the Japanese and presented a 10-point American peace proposal, which was so extreme that it was designed to rally American and world opinion rather than prevent a Japanese-American war.[33)]

Hull's decision and the contents of the American proposal led Foreign Minister Togo to conclude "that the United States had by this time determined on war with Japan." In truth, the United States had not determined on war with Japan, but in the last days of peace America would know for three and half years, the architects of American Far Eastern diplomacy refused to take any action that might free Japan from its war in China or deplete China's martial resolve.[34)]

Even if this meant war with Japan.

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31) *FRUS*, 1941, 4, 654, Quo-Tai-chi to Hu Shih, November 24, 1941; Ibid., 652, Lattimore to Currie, November 25, 1941; Ibid., 650, Memorandum of Hornbeck-Hu Shih Conversation, November 25, 1941; Ibid., 652-654, Memorandum of Hull-Hu Shih Conversation, November 25, 1941.

32) *Cordell Hull Papers*, Library of Congress, Washington DC, Box 58, Folder 214, Memorandum of Hull-Halifax Conversation, November 29, 1941; *FRUS*, 1941, 4, 669, Memorandum of Hull-Louden Conversation, November 27, 1941. See also Keiichiro Komatsu, *Origins of the Pacific War and the Importance of "Magic"* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 319-320.

33) *Stimson Diary,* Sterling Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, book 36, page 50.

34) *International Military Tribunal for the Far East* (Washington DC: Library of Congress, Photoduplication Service, 1971) 26,055-56.