On August 4, 1941 Japanese Prime Minister Prince Fumimaro Konoye made up his mind "to personally meet with the President" of the United States for the purpose of expressing "straight forwardly and boldly, the true intentions of the [Japanese Empire.]" When revealing the plan to his War and Navy Ministers that same evening, Konoye admitted that while the creation of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere remained Japan's goal, it would be "too much to expect this ideal be fulfilled at once." The Prince remained confident that a broad minded approach would bring success to both the negotiations and Japan's objective. Konoye reasoned that the meeting had to take place before the German-Soviet War peaked, which was expected in September, because the Prince believed that German success would stiffen the American attitude towards Japan. The Premier maintained that if the conference failed, the Japanese people would know "that a Japanese-American war could not be avoided." Therefore, while pursuing the conference, Konoye expected that the nation "be fully prepared for war against America." 1

Scholars have debated the wisdom of the American decision not to go to the summit. Those who have supported President Roosevelt's course of action have been labeled "Internationalists" or "Court" historians. To these writers, Roosevelt's primary interest lay in Europe, and that his Far Eastern Policy was designed to avert any showdown with Japan. The steps he took in 1940 and 1941 were intended to check Japan by all means short of war. America's objective had been to seek a peaceful settlement with Japan that would have upheld American security and principles, protect China, and honor the British, French, and Dutch interests in the Far East. Clear indications of Konoye's ability to control Japan's aggressive expansion were needed to insure the success of American-Japanese diplomacy. 2

In opposition have been the "Revisionist" writers. Their case has rested

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upon a number of assumptions. First, these writers have denied that the Axis Powers threatened America's vital interests. The second was, that Roosevelt deliberately pursued a policy that only could have resulted in war in both Europe and Asia. Finally, Roosevelt misled the American people by telling them that he was working for peace while, in reality, he had been laying the foundation for war. Regarding the proposed Leader's Conference, the "Revisionists" have argued that Roosevelt did not want to meet with Konoye for fear of reaching a successful conclusion. Rather he pushed Konoye into a corner where there was no room to maneuver. Only further aggression by Japan would avoid entrapment. This had been Roosevelt's objective.\(^3\)

A sense of "Neo-Revisionism" also has appeared. According to this interpretation, the United States pursued a misguided policy towards Asia. The central issue in United States-Japanese relations had been China. The erroneous American belief that someday China would be a viable nation forced Japan into the arms of the Axis Powers in an effort to achieve her goals: an outlet for her expanding population and the need for natural resources and arable land. These writers have argued that the United States had been blind to the reality of the Asian situation, and thus made unreasonable demands upon Japan in 1941. Konoye could not have agreed to abandon Japan's objectives prior to a summit conference. However, had Roosevelt gone to the summit, he would have come to understand the changing nature of Far Eastern policies.\(^4\)

Pitfalls beseech each of these interpretations. The "Court" historians had particular relations with the American Government. Rauch had been an advisor to President Roosevelt; Feis served as Special Advisor on International Economic Affairs to the Secretary of State; Gleason in the State Department's Historical Office. Such associations normally color one's opinion. The "Revisionists'" argument that Roosevelt deliberately forced Japan into a course of war has not been substantiated by documentation. Other studies indicate that this decision already had been made in Tokyo.\(^5\) The "Neo-Revisionists" have had the advantage of 20/20 hindsight, influenced by the ever changing patterns of world order since 1945.

Absent from these discussions has been the role of Dr. Stanley K. Hornbeck, Political Advisor in the Far Eastern Division of the State Department. Hornbeck's view of Japanese external relations since 1854, coupled


with the contemporary evidence in August and September 1941 were of paramount importance to the ultimate American decision.

When Prince Konoye had met with Naval Minister Koshiro Oikawa and War Minister Hideki Tojo on August 4, he had not been proposing any new idea. The concept of a Roosevelt-Konoye meeting had been traced to the “John Doe Associates.” The private efforts of Father James M. Drought, Vicar of Maryknoll Priesthood; Hideo Iwakuto, Japanese Army Colonel on special assignment to Ambassador Kichisabura Nomura in Washington; and Tadao Paul Wikawa, who claimed to be serving as a private agent for the premier of Japan, had died in June 1941 because of the unofficial status of their diplomatic efforts. This time, however, Konoye gave the official stamp of approval and communicated directions to Ambassador Nomura on August 7. Advised to maintain public secrecy on the subject until a meeting could be arranged, the Ambassador was to indicate to Roosevelt that the agenda be flexible, and suggest that a small party of advisors accompany each head of state.

Ambassador Nomura first met with Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Joseph Ballantine of State’s Far Eastern Division, on August 8. “Hull gave a negative reply to the proposal.” He also discussed the proposal with Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, who believed that Konoye’s invitation was “merely a blind to try to keep us [the United States] from taking definite action.” Stimson maintained that the Japanese were already committed to going through Indo-China into Thailand. Nomura met again with Hull, on Saturday August 16, suggesting that if the heads of state could not meet, possibly respective cabinet members might. He further reported that his government “would make concessions to avoid war.”

On the following day, August 17, Ambassador Nomura with President Roosevelt and Secretary Hull at the White House, presented the President a communique from Tokyo:

Prince Konoye feels so severely and so earnestly about preserving . . . relations that he would be disposed to meet with the President midway, geographically speaking, between our two countries and sit down together and talk . . . in a peaceful spirit.

Concealing emotion from already having learned of the proposal, Roosevelt complimented Konoye’s spirit in suggesting a meeting. Although “keenly

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7 CJC, Part 12, Exhibits of the Joint Committee, “The Magic Messages,” pp. 12-13. The “Magic” Messages were the intercepted diplomatic correspondence between Tokyo and its foreign office throughout the world. The Americans had successfully broken the Japanese diplomatic code in August 1940. Secretary of State Cordell Hull was one of several United States officials who reviewed these diplomatic papers. For a discussion of the “Magic” papers see: Roberta Wohlstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962); and Ladislas Farago, op. cit.
9 Stimson Diary, Volume 35, August, 1941. Yale University Library. Brackets supplied.
10 711.94/2185.
11 711.94/2184.
interested in having three or four days with Konoye," the President suggested Juneau, Alaska as a more preferable place over Honolulu, Hawaii. Desirous of reaching an agreement with Japan, the President thought it would have been a "wonderful stroke" to separate Japan from the Tripartite Pact. Although Roosevelt would meet with Nomura again, he turned the matter over to Secretary Hull. Stanley Hornbeck became the prominent figure in determining the American response.

To Hornbeck, Japan had pursued an expansionist policy since her opening to the world in 1854, and her present actions continued to move in that direction. Japan's violation of the Root-Takahira Agreement, the Lansing-Ishii Notes, her Twenty One Demands against China, her violation of the League of Nations' Charter, her dismissal of the Nine Power Treaty, and continued aggression in China rendered clear evidence of Japan's inability to behave morally in international affairs. There existed no evidence that Konoye would or could reverse this trend.

As Hornbeck considered the evidence before him, he ignored the encouragement offered via cable from Ambassador Joseph C. Grew in Tokyo. Ambassador Grew begged that "for the sake of avoiding the obviously growing possibility of an utterly futile war" between Japan and the United States, the proposal be given careful consideration, and that any further economic restrictions against Japan be held in abeyance. Hornbeck believed that Grew, too sympathetic to Konoye, did not have a broad view of the situation because of the controlled press in Japan.

Rather, Hornbeck considered the immediate events, judging them against his view of Japan's previous policy. Within a five day period, August 18-22 several incidents influenced the American decision. Throughout Manchuria serious unrest had spread among the Chinese as a result of economic hardships, conscription by brutal means, and forced erection of further fortifications for an anticipated Russian attack upon Japanese troops there. Chinese guerilla bands appeared in Manchuria, causing Ambassador Grew to believe that revolution might break out if a Russo-Japanese war occurred. Japanese civilians in Manchuria protested increased taxation and the regimented policies imposed upon them.

On August 21, Eiji Amanu, former Ambassador to Italy, was appointed Vice Minister in the Konoye Cabinet. Amanu had been known aboard as the author of a 1934 statement declaring that Japan would assume sole responsibility for maintaining peace and order in East Asia. On the same day,
Japanese troops occupied the Spratly Islands, a fact which brought prospective Japanese military bases to within seventy miles of the Philippines.\textsuperscript{18}

Regarding Japanese activity on the Asian mainland, Tokyo clearly indicated that it wanted to settle the "China Incident" herself and that the United States should bring pressure upon Chiang Kai-Shek to negotiate. Once the China problem had been successfully completed, Japan promised to withdraw its troops from Indo-China, where they had been sent supposedly to hasten the solution of the Chinese situation. The United States had interpreted these suggestions as meaning her abandonment of China to Japan, and did not accept the occupation of Indo-China as a necessary step toward the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Vis-a-vis} their respective allies, divergent views were held. Japan wanted to interpret her relations with the Tripartite Pact to her own advantage, while the Americans insisted that she give clear assurances that Tokyo would not use this alliance against the United States. Also, the Japanese wanted to deal with the United States alone, but the Americans felt that her allies — the British, Dutch, and Chinese — had to be kept fully informed of and in agreement with the Japanese negotiations.\textsuperscript{20}

Apparently, the American economic embargo against Japan was taking its toll. The Japanese Commerce Ministry announced ordinances curtailing oil consumption, the rationing of kerosene, light and machine oils, compelling a larger admixture of alcohol with gasoline, expanding synthetic oil production and the oil refining industry.\textsuperscript{21} Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson indicated the severity of Japan's trade problems on August 16.\textsuperscript{22} The hope was that the economic pressure would thwart aggression.

The intensity of Konoye's desire to meet with Roosevelt shortly thereafter, had great influence on Hornbeck's reasoning. The Premier appealed personally to Roosevelt on August 28, explaining that Japan desired peace, and that a failure to adjust problems would mean "the collapse of world civilization." Konoye argued that Japan's actions in the Far East were defensive in nature and a requisite for a just peace.\textsuperscript{23} On several occasions, Japan attempted to impress upon the United States the necessity of holding a summit conference as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{24}

Mindful that Prince Konoye had been Japan's Premier when the China War began in 1937, when the Tripartite Pact was signed in 1940, and again when the occupation of Indo-China had been completed in July 1941, Hornbeck reasoned that there existed no evidence that Konoye would or

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\textsuperscript{18} Otto Tolischus, \textit{Tokyo Record} (New York: Reynold and Hitchcock, 1943) p. 234.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Foreign Relations, Japan, 1931-1941}, Volume II, p. 581.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 577.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Newsmorew.}, XVIII (August 11, 1941) p. 17.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Foreign Relations, Japan 1931-1941}, Volume II, pp. 571-576.
\textsuperscript{24} 711.94/2182; 711.94/2210; and \textit{Foreign Relations, Japan 1931-1941}, Volume II, p. 587.

The "Magic" papers also revealed that Japan had reached the point where it had printed its "last hope... on an interview between the Premier and the President." \textit{CJC}, Part 12, "The Magic Messages," p. 20. There is no evidence indicating that Hull, who read these messages, passed such information along to Hornbeck.
could reverse this aggressive trend. As to the immediate situation, Hornbeck concluded that Japan was already a half beaten nation and not capable of further military success. Furthermore, Prince Konoye had no real control over his own government; rather military leaders directed the machinery. The real crisis existed not between Japan and the United States, but within Japan. Until the crisis between and among Japan's leaders could be solved, and until she abandoned her program of conquest, Hornbeck recommended that a Leader's Conference be avoided.

Both Secretary Hull and President Roosevelt concurred with Hornbeck's opinion. In the afternoon of September 3, Ambassador Nomura was summoned to the White House and informed of the American decision. Roosevelt again expressed his willingness to meet with Konoye, provided a preliminary agreement could be reached focusing upon four fundamental principles: (1) respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of each and all nations, (2) support of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, (3) support of the principle of equality, including the equality of commercial opportunity and, (4) non disturbance of the status quo in the Pacific except as the status quo may be altered by peaceful means. The Americans remained convinced that their position had been consistent with previous statements. The United States thus wanted Japan to give a more definite statement of her objectives and clear illustrations of her peaceful intent.

On the same day, September 3, that Nomura met with Roosevelt in Washington, Prince Konoye, in Tokyo, developed a new proposal, hoping to clarify Japan's position and hasten a summit conference. Reception of the Japanese offer in Washington had been lukewarm, but clarification of several points were sought.

The final Japanese explanation arrived in Washington September 25, which was viewed by the State Department as a reiteration of the proposal earlier that month, or a further narrowing of her position. The redundant areas included Japan's right to independently interpret the Tripartite Pact, should the United States enter the Atlantic War; a pledge not to go beyond Indo-China and the withdrawal of these troops once the "China Affair" had been settled; immediate resumption of Japanese-American trade relations; and acceptance of the principle of non-discrimination in economic activities in the Southwest Pacific. The new proposals anticipated that President Roosevelt would use his good offices in bringing about peace with Chiang Kai-Shek, a peace that would fuse the "Government" of Wang Ching-Wei and the "regime" of Chiang, and providing for the recognition of Manchukuo. Japanese troops were to be withdrawn from China, save those necessary for the prevention of communistic and subversive activities. The China peace

25 Dr. Stanley R. Hornbeck, Personal Interview, September 28, 1962.
also was to establish economic cooperation "with the principle of especially close relationship which is neutral between neighboring countries." Finally Japan asked that Americans neutralize the Philippines, and alleviate their military measures in the Pacific as a step towards political stabilization of the area.\textsuperscript{80}

Again, Hornbeck counseled Secretary Hull that nothing contained in these Japanese proposals offered a clear indication that Konoye controlled that Nipponese political and military machines. No clear timetable for withdrawal of troops from the mainland had been presented. China’s integrity and sovereignty were to be sacrificed. As with the Root-Takihira Agreement and Lansing-Ishi notes, only the United States was to take steps limiting military strength in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{81}

Other evidence indicated the severity of Japan’s economic plight. Her request for the immediate lifting of the frozen Japanese assets in the United States and reopening of American trade implied that the economic vice had tightened Japan’s belt considerably. On September 22, a total of 150 new iron articles were added to the previous list of 200 varieties of goods banned from production, including many articles of daily use: can openers, sugar tongs, cocktail shakers, sukiyaka pans, finger bowls, camera tripods and nut crackers.\textsuperscript{82}

Equally important were the signs of opposition to Konoye’s political strength. Public denunciation of the United States and her relations with Japan increased in both rapidity and intensity. Major Shoyo Nahayima of the Army Information Board declared to the press that it was “impossible for Japan to change its determination to establish the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.”\textsuperscript{83} Nazi and Fascist personnel were reported to hold influential positions in Japan’s propaganda machinery.\textsuperscript{84} Extremists and Pro Axis elements were involved in an assassination attempt on Konoye’s life and in a planned \textit{coup d’etat}.\textsuperscript{85} Japan’s insistence for the immediate convening of the Leader’s Conference, suggesting not later than October 10-15, indicated the strain under which Konoye had been operating.\textsuperscript{86}

Within the circle of characters weighing the values of Japan’s offer, only Ambassador Joseph C. Grew in Tokyo continued to beg Washington’s acceptance of Prince Konoye’s “professed sincerity of intention and good

\textsuperscript{80} Foreign Relations, Japan 1931-1941, Volume II, pp. 633; 637-640.

\textsuperscript{81} Stanley K. Hornbeck, Personal Interview, September 28, 1962.

\textsuperscript{82} Otto Tölishus, \textit{Tokyo Record}, p. 255.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 244.

\textsuperscript{84} Foreign Relations, 1941, The Far East, Volume IV, pp. 441-442; 450-451.


\textsuperscript{86} CJC, Part 12, “The Magic Messages,” pp. 23-45; \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan 1931-1941}, Volume II, pp. 609; 619; 636 and Cordell Hull, \textit{Memoirs}, Volume II, p. 1032. The available evidence does not indicate that the Americans knew of the Japanese imperial Conference of September 6, whereby the government determined that diplomatic negotiations with the United States had to be concluded by mid October, otherwise Japan would go to war. See Herbert Feis, \textit{Road to Pearl Harbor} and Roberta Wohlstetter, \textit{Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision}. During his interrogation at the International Military Tribunal, General Tojo reported that “it was decided to continue negotiations with America and hope for a break by the middle ten days of October.” See International Military Tribunal, Far East, Tokyo, 1946-1948, \textit{Record of Proceedings, Exhibits, Miscellaneous Documents, Proceedings, Tojo}, p. 10, 220.
faith” to redirect Japan’s future policy. In the State Department, those concerned reached a consensus of opinion: “there should be no meeting until we had reached agreement on several principles,” and their “practical application”. However, the Japanese had moved in another direction. She had left open important questions such as troop removals from China, her interpretation of the Tripartite Pact, and non-discriminatory trade in the Pacific. Secretary Hull concluded that the Japanese “should go back to their original liberal attitudes so we can start discussions again on agreement in principle before the meeting”. Hull again approached War Secretary Henry L. Stimson to the wisdom of the American position. Stimson replied, “that no promises of the Japs based on words would be worth anything” and that if the President were to meet with Konoye, it should not be done until the Japanese effected “an evacuation of China” and a commitment not to attack Russia.

On Cordell Hull’s seventieth birthday, October 2, Ambassador Nomura received the news that a fundamental agreement in principle had to be reached before a summit conference; a meeting Roosevelt still favored. Nomura cabled Tokyo that the American position on the proposed summit conference “would be a precarious affair unless a (complete?) understanding could be arrived at”. Apparently, unaware that Konoye’s political life was near its end, the United States awaited the next Japanese move. However, nothing fruitful came of the meeting held with Bishop James Walsh in the evening of October 14. For when Walsh reached Washington, November 15, exactly one month had elapsed since Konoye’s fall from political power and the emergence of General Hedeki Tojo. A new climate prevailed and the opportunity for adjusting problems via a summit conference had disappeared.

Over a two month period, August and September 1941, intensive efforts by Prince Konoye to deter an American-Japanese collision failed. His opinion that a summit conference afforded the final opportunity for peace was shared by Ambassador Grew, and concurred with by Secretary Hull when he wrote his memoirs after the war. Even President Roosevelt expressed a willingness to meet Konoye. Why then did the proposed conference fail to become a

39 Dr. Stanley K. Hornbeck, Personal Interview, September 28, 1962.
42 Stimson Diary, Volume 35. Yale University Library, pp. 1-2.
45 For a fuller discussion of the October Cabinet change see: Herbert Feis, Road to Pearl Harbor, pp. 282-286; David John Lu, Marco Polo Bridge, pp. 201-215; and Robert J. C. Butow, Tojo and War, pp. 291-294.
reality? The influence of Stanley K. Hornbeck was all important, and his viewpoint permeated throughout Washington's official communications on the subject.

A career State Department employee, Hornbeck held to the principle of the "Open Door" and the belief that China would emerge as the Pacific Power. According to Hornbeck, Japan had long challenged this position, and the fact that Konoye had been Prime Minister when the China War started in 1937, when the Tripartite Pact had been signed in 1940 and when the occupation of Indo-China had been completed in 1941, gave no indication of a change in Japan's direction. The fact that Japan sought special privilege in China, recognition of Manchukuo, and failed to indicate her own military de-escalation in the Pacific once peace came to the area, not only violated the "Open Door" and sacrificed China's integrity, and also helped to make Japan the major Asian power. This could not be, for the United States maintained that China be the primary Pacific nation. The "Neo-Revisionist" historians appear correct, given the power situation in the Pacific by 1941, and the Hornbeck can be faulted for not having wider vision. As Hornbeck dismissed Ambassador Grew's views for being too narrow, Hornbeck himself was guilty of the same.

Hornbeck's rejection of the belief that Konoye could not enforce any agreement upon the diverse elements of the Japanese political structure provides some comfort for the "Court" historians. The Prime Minister's inability to tone down the anti-American press, offset Nazi propaganda influence, failure to define Tokyo's role in the Axis Pact, unwillingness to present a timetable for withdrawal from the Asian mainland, and the extremists assassination plot did not portray a picture of a man in command of his own household. Some clear indications of Konoye's ability to control these factions might have offered some hope for success at the summit, but none were forthcoming.

The United States had hoped to dissuade Japan's direction by using economic leverage, but not deliberately force Japan to war, as the "Revisionists" have charged. The acute shortage of raw materials brought the nation to austere measures in the summer of 1941, and Washington had hoped such pressure would have caused Japan to compromise her position. Hornbeck concurred with the wisdom of this policy. Washington had misjudged, however, and the nationalistic reaction of Japan became unvented. A Pacific War may not have been unavoidable, but its arrival on December 7, 1941 may have been caused by the national reaction to the economic crunch. Given the course of international events since 1945, one must ponder if this historical lesson has been learned.