

**The History of the Twentieth Century**  
**Episode 349**  
**“Why Do the Winds and Waves Rage So Turbulently?”**  
**Transcript**

[music: Fanfare]

*Throughout the world  
Everywhere we are brothers  
Why then do the winds and waves rage so turbulently?*

Poem composed by the Meiji Emperor.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 349. Why Do the Winds and Waves Rage So Turbulently?

Last week, we were moving along very nicely with the narrative of the German war against the Soviet Union, until early December 1941, when two important things happened. First, the Red Army began a winter counteroffensive. I'm going to put a pin in that story for a while and turn instead to the second major development: Japan declared war on the United States.

To tell that story, we're going to have to turn back the clock a bit. Ever since the German annexation of Austria, I've been focusing on the events that led to war in Europe, and then to the war itself, but we have another war that's already started between Japan and China. I've described that war to you up to the Japanese capture of the Chinese capital city, Nanjing, and the terrible events that followed once Japanese troops marched into the city, the Nanjing Massacre.

That was four years ago, so I have four years worth of history to get caught up to, and believe it or not, I'm going to cover it all in this one episode. Yes, I am!

After the fall of Nanjing, you'll recall, the Chinese government relocated to Wuhan, a city roughly 450 kilometers to the west, deeper into the interior of China. If you remember the Boxer Uprising, you'll remember that withdrawing into the interior and taking advantage of China's size has long been the go-to move when China was attacked by invaders on the coast. The

Japanese Army accepted the challenge and began a long, slow advance toward Wuhan. Chiang Kai-shek vowed to fight on and Chinese soldiers did fight fiercely, but the Japanese were better trained and better equipped and gradually pushed the Chinese back.

In June 1938, the Chinese made the dubious decision to destroy dikes along the Yellow River, which produced a huge flood that submerged a large area of central China. On the plus side, these floods impeded the Japanese advance, destroying roads and railroads and preventing a Japanese advance into the key province of Sichuan in the southwest of the country. It was also a scorched-earth move, to flood the farmland of the region and deny it to the Japanese. On the minus side, the floods killed half a million Chinese and forced millions more into poverty and misery until the dikes were repaired in 1945. So was it worth it? Seems questionable.

As the Japanese Army pushed deeper into China, the government in Tokyo became increasingly alarmed. The Army was virtually running this war on its own and seemed to have no plan, other than to keep fighting until it had all of China under its control. Was that even possible? And what would happen afterward? Tokyo initiated back-door negotiations with the Nationalist government in Wuhan using the German ambassador to China as an intermediary, as Germany had amicable relations with both sides. The initial peace offer from Tokyo was so generous that Chiang was tempted to take it, but as he deliberated the Japanese Army pressed on, even taking the provocative step of setting up a rival Chinese government in Beijing, and the talks fell apart.

I mentioned earlier that in March 1938, the Japanese Diet passed a bill permitting the Army to mobilize on a grand scale. This represented the civilian government essentially ceding control over the war to the Army.

In late October 1938, as the Sudetenland Crisis was playing out in Europe, the Japanese Army captured Wuhan, after weeks of intense, costly combat. The Chinese defenders were able to withdraw from the city in good order, and the government moved farther inland to the city of Chongqing in Sichuan province, deep in the mountains of the southwest.

By the end of 1938, there were three Chinas. Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, based in its provisional capital of Chongqing, where most government officials, university professors, and the remnants of China's industrial base established themselves. The Nationalist government still held authority over about half of China's population and food production, but its tax and industrial bases were slender.

Western aid to the Nationalist government was virtually nil. Germany cut off its support in February 1938, after Hitler decided Japan was a more valuable ally. The Soviet Union was at this time China's most important foreign provider of military assistance, which, please note, they sent to the Nationalist government, not the Communists. But Soviet aid would end in August 1939, following the signing of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Agreement.

Wang Jingwei, a former prime minister and Chiang's longtime political rival, whose name has come up a couple of times before on this podcast, fled Chongqing for Hanoi, in French Indochina, where he announced his support for peace with Japan. He survived an assassination attempt in early 1939 and moved on to Japanese-occupied Shanghai, where he began negotiating with the Japanese. In March 1940, Wang would become head of state of the second China, the Japanese-supported "Reorganized National Government of the Republic of China" and in that role, Wang signed a peace treaty with Japan.

The third China, the Communist-controlled territory in and around the region of Ya'nan, was in a situation similar to the Nationalists. They ruled their people and controlled enough agricultural production to feed them, but lacked the modern weapons that would allow them to challenge the Japanese. They resorted to hit-and-run guerilla raids.

The year 1938 rolled over to 1939. From the maps you might conclude that the Japanese offensive into China had produced impressive gains, but the reality was that Japan had spent millions of yen and lost thousands of soldiers, but final victory was nowhere in sight, and Japan had become a pariah in the Western world, especially in the United States.

If you think back to the early years of the podcast—er, I mean, of the twentieth century—you will recall the Boxer Uprising, in which Japanese and American soldiers in China fought together in a common cause, episode 15. Then there was the Russo-Japanese War, in which most Americans were sympathetic to Japan. When Japan had just about run out of money, US President Theodore Roosevelt negotiated a peace agreement, the Treaty of Portsmouth, mostly favorable to the Japanese side.

Nonetheless, public opinion in Japan saw the treaty as too lenient toward Russia. Anti-American riots broke out across the country, episode 35. You might mark this as the moment Japanese-American relations began to sour.

In 1906, the school board in San Francisco voted to force children of Japanese ancestry out of the white schools and into the segregated schools created for Chinese students. This led to talk of war in Tokyo, episode 43.

Japan fought on the Allied side during the First World War, but felt humiliated by the peace negotiations, in which the American President Woodrow Wilson resisted Japan's call for an anti-racism clause in the peace agreement, episode 199. A few years later, the Americans pressed Japan to give the Chinese territories it had wrested from Germany back to China. A couple of years after that, the Americans enacted the Immigration Act of 1924, which completely banned Japanese emigration to the United States.

To the Japanese, a proud people, this felt like a series of slaps in the face. Many voices were heard in Japan arguing that the Western nations in general, and the United States in particular,

did not respect Japan, did not regard Japan or Japanese people as their equals, and all signs indicated they never would.

When Japan occupied Manchuria, and then went to war with China, American condemnation was harsh, which struck most Japanese as hypocritical. Why was there a Monroe Doctrine in the Western Hemisphere, but an Open Door Policy in East Asia? Why was it perfectly fine for the US to intervene militarily when law and order broke down in Cuba, Panama, Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, or the Dominican Republic, but when Japan took action against the bandits and warlords of Manchuria and northern China, the Americans cried foul. Why was it acceptable for nations like Britain, France, and the Netherlands to seize and govern large territories in Asia, but an outrage when Japan attempted the same thing?

On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, the American public found Japanese behavior just as perplexing. The Japanese could be polite and courteous to a fault one minute, ruthless and bloodthirsty the next. Sometimes they behaved in a manner that seemed brave and honorable, but at other times they veered into cowardice and treachery. Americans summed up these contradictory characteristics in one word, *inscrutable*, a word that began as a descriptor but soon became first a cliché and then a stereotype.

Westerners tend to see morality as black and white. An action is good or it is bad. Japanese-style Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, embraces contradiction as inevitable. There are no universal truths applicable to any person in any situation. The self is nothing. Each of us is just a bubble riding on the ocean, carried one way or the other by the waves.

In Japan the right wing bitterly resented Western support for China. Political leaders who favored friendly relations with America and the Western powers were targeted for assassination, as we have seen. There were plots to blow up the US and UK embassies. Western visitors were sometimes refused hotel rooms and found themselves publicly berated. Occasionally, they were physically attacked.

In Japan, the waves were carrying everyone toward war, even pro-Western politicians who either risked their lives, or bowed to the inevitable.

In 1938, the Japanese Kwantung Army confronted the Red Army in a border dispute between Mongolia and Manchukuo. The Japanese attempted to push the Soviets out of disputed territory, but failed. The Army evaluated the failure and attempted a larger effort to push the Soviets out of the disputed territory in 1939. I talked about this conflict a little bit in episode 316.

Once again, the Kwantung Army had initiated a conflict on its own authority, without the knowledge or approval of the civilian leadership in Tokyo. The Army advanced into Mongolian territory claimed by Japan. The Red Army resisted the Japanese invasion. The fighting went on from May to August of 1939. Both sides took substantial losses of soldiers and arms, losses that the vast Soviet Union could more easily replace than much smaller Japan, which was also

fighting a war against China. In August, Red Army commander Georgy Zhukov began an offensive with heavy air support which caught the Japanese unprepared, surrounding a Japanese infantry division and forcing the Japanese to agree to an armistice.

This combat is known as the Battle of Khalkhin Gol and it was a serious embarrassment for the Japanese Army. The fighting revealed that the Russians had more and better tanks and combat aircraft than the Japanese and their tactics weren't too shabby either. The Japanese military needed better arms and better tactics and it needed them right away. As for the Soviet Union, it was obvious Japan could not defeat the leviathan alone. Perhaps in cooperation with Germany...?

Then came the news, just three days later, that Germany and the USSR had entered into a non-aggression agreement. So much for that idea. Which would be the way forward now? The government had no answer, so the prime minister—whose name I will not trouble you with—resigned, citing—wait for it—“the inscrutable situation[]” in Europe.

The year 1939 passed into 1940. The Japanese Army General Staff, frustrated by the lack of progress in China, began discussing a strategy of pulling out of China, except for a buffer region in the north to guard against Nationalist or Communist attacks into Manchukuo. Then came the German Western offensive in May. France fell, and the mood in the Japanese Army transformed overnight. Had not the Germans revealed the weakness of the democratic West? The very same voices that were counseling withdrawal from China a few weeks ago were now chattering with excitement about the prospects of seizing Singapore, British Malaya, French Indochina, the Dutch East Indies. These would provide the raw materials Japan sorely needed, especially the oil fields of the East Indies. With their homelands occupied, the French and Dutch would be in no position to resist, and the British had bigger fish to fry. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed, and these discussions were tabled. For now.

Prince Konoe, who had been out of power for a while, was appointed prime minister for the second time. He made two key Cabinet appointments to two key ministries. The foreign ministry portfolio went to 59-year-old diplomat Matsuoka Yōsuke. It was Matsuoka who had led the Japanese walkout from the League of Nations in 1933. He advocated a foreign policy hostile to the United States and friendly with Germany and Italy.

To the war ministry, the Prince appointed the 55-year-old chief of staff of the Kwantung Army, General Tōjō Hideki. Tōjō was respected in the Army. He was a strict disciplinarian, which was why they nicknamed him “The Razor.” Yes, he was a right-wing militarist, but he also had zero patience with these young zealots in the military resorting to violence to get their way. There was a chain of command, and junior officers should either respect it or be punished for their disobedience. This attitude made him popular with the civilian leadership who by now had had their fill of those young zealots, and this was likely the reason Prince Konoe chose him.

Just four days after the new Cabinet was seated, it unanimously approved an ambitious national agenda. It began with the premise that the world had become a chaotic and dangerous place. In such a world, the key to Japanese security was a new order in Greater East Asia. Japan must unite with Manchukuo and China, and take advantage of the turmoil in Europe to seize European possessions in East Asia. Japan would form a new coalition, made up of Asian nations, and lead it, naturally. Japan would enter into the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy and a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union. As for the Americans, Japan would seek friendly relations with them too, so long as the United States did not interfere in Japan's new foreign policy.

The first target of Japan's new policy was Indochina, China's link to aid from the outside world and a land rich in rubber, tin, tungsten, coal, and rice, ruled by France, which was now under German occupation. I already described to you in episode 325 Japan's moves to station military units in Indochina and to close off foreign aid to China, which it accomplished without need to resort to force. So far so good.

With French Indochina no longer available as an import route to China, that left only the Burma Road, an 1,100 kilometer road that linked the Chinese provincial capital of Kunming with the town of Lashio, in the northeast of Burma. Lashio was connected by rail to Rangoon, on the coast, allowing for a clear, if arduous, passage through which foreign aid could still reach China.

In the summer of 1940, the Japanese pressured the British to close the Burma Road. The Churchill government, stunned by the defeat of France and finding itself short on allies, grudgingly agreed. They hoped this would placate Japan and secure British holdings in East Asia. But after three months, the British were feeling braver and the Japanese weren't looking very placated, so they opened the road again.

Back in Tokyo, as talks on the coming Tripartite Pact neared their conclusion, the Navy was leery of the agreement. The admirals protested it held the potential to drag Japan into some future European conflict in which it was not in Japan's interest to get involved. No, no, said foreign minister Matsuoka. The pact would force the United States to act more prudently in its dealings with Japan, lest it face a two-front conflict on opposite sides of the world.

When the prime minister took the Pact to the Emperor for his official seal, the Emperor warned him the agreement would likely lead to war with Britain and the United States. In the US and the UK, Japan's throwing in with Germany and Italy was seen as the clinching proof that the Japanese government was no better than the brutal fascists of Europe.

Ever since the Battle of Shanghai in 1938, the United States government had been stridently condemning the Japanese war against China. The Roosevelt Administration called for what it described as a "moral embargo," that is, it took no official action, but pressured American corporations informally not to sell exports to Japan that could support the war against China. This mostly meant aircraft, aircraft parts, manufacturing equipment and high-grade aviation

gasoline with tetraethyl lead. US Secretary of State Cordell Hull took note of Japanese bombings of Chinese civilians and told these US corporations that their exports were encouraging this slaughter.

In 1939, the US withdrew from its 1911 commercial treaty with Japan, ending Japan's privileged status as a "most favored nation." In 1940, Congress passed the Export Control Act, which gave the President broad powers to impose real, legal embargoes on Japan, as opposed to moral ones. As soon as the Act was law, the Roosevelt Administration completely banned US exports of aviation-related products to Japan, though it went no further than that. The Administration walked a thin line, hoping to strike a balance between punishing Japan for its brutality without being provocative.

At the same time, President Roosevelt ordered the US Pacific Fleet to be moved from its station in San Diego to Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii, as a warning to the Japanese.

This will have consequences.

In autumn, when the Japanese moved those military units into Indochina, the Roosevelt Administration responded by adding scrap metal to the embargo list. Japan was a major importer of scrap metal, and three-quarters of it came from the United States. This was a serious blow to Japanese arms manufacturing. The Japanese ambassador in Washington warned Secretary of State Hull that his government might view this move as an unfriendly act.

In March 1941, Japanese foreign minister Matsuoka took the long ride along the Trans-Siberian railroad, first to Berlin for talks with the Germans, then to Moscow for talks with the Soviets. In the meetings with Hitler and Ribbentrop, the Germans made their case for Japan to seize Singapore. Hitler told him such a move would help keep America out of the war, because the Americans wouldn't risk sending their navy into Japanese-controlled waters. And if America did attack Japan, Hitler assured him Germany would come to Japan's defense, pointing out, in Hitler's words, "the fact that the German soldiers were, obviously, far superior to the Americans."

In fact, Matsuoka was aware that the Japanese Navy was already contemplating the seizure of Singapore, but he was under strict instructions not to reveal this to the Germans. His meetings with Stalin in Moscow were far more comfortable. They concluded a non-aggression pact between their two nations. Stalin threw a huge party to celebrate and personally delivered plates of hors d'oeuvres and hugged and kissed the bemused Japanese. He offered a toast to the Japanese Emperor and declared that treaties should never be broken, irrespective of ideological differences.

Recall that Stalin reasoned Hitler could not possibly be planning to attack the Soviet Union, because if he were, he would not have permitted the Japanese to sign this agreement. This would explain his exuberance.

When the time came for the Japanese to return home, a drunken Stalin followed them to the train station, where he hugged and kissed the Japanese diplomats some more. This was the occasion when Stalin turned to the German military attaché and told him how important it was that the USSR and Germany remain friends.

Soon after, a most unorthodox diplomatic initiative was begun by an American Catholic bishop. James Edward Walsh had served a diocese in China, before the war with Japan had begun. Now he traveled to Tokyo with a peace proposal, which he presented to Ikawa Tadao, a director of the Japanese Central Agricultural and Forestry Bank. Ikawa had lived in the US for several years and had married an American.

The bishop presented Ikawa with a memorandum he had written proposing a basis for peaceful relations between the US and Japan. The memorandum called for the two countries to take a joint stand against Communism, US recognition of a Japanese Monroe Doctrine for East Asia, withdrawal of Japanese troops from China, and US diplomatic recognition of Manchukuo. The bishop assured Ikawa that he had the ear of prominent members of the Roosevelt Administration and could sell them on this proposal. Japanese leaders were encouraged enough to endorse the plan.

The bishop returned to America. It turned out that the prominent member of the Administration he had contact with was Postmaster General Frank Walker, a devout Catholic. Walker sent the proposal to the President, who forwarded it to Cordell Hull, who was skeptical.

Negotiations ensued, outside the usual diplomatic channels, and a Draft Understanding was presented to Cordell Hull. The Japanese ambassador met with Hull to discuss it. Hull told him the US would agree, provided it included terms committing Japan to respect the territorial integrity of other nations in the region and forswear the use of force.

The overeager Japanese ambassador reported to Tokyo that the Americans were willing to accept the Draft Understanding after negotiating a few details. He did not mention that the “details” would involve a 180° change of course in Japanese foreign policy.

In Tokyo, Matsuoka was concerned that any deal with the United States might be seen in Berlin as a Japanese betrayal. So he sent the German government a copy of the Draft Understanding and asked for their views. He told the Cabinet that Japan should insist the US sign a non-aggression agreement that would be binding even if Japan attacked British holdings before moving forward with the Draft Understanding. He sent the Americans a revised version that deleted the requirements that Japan withdraw from China and that it renounce the use of force.

Cordell Hull sent a reply laying out his own preconditions: Japan would have to withdraw completely from China, including the North, and it would have to renounce the Tripartite Pact.



On June 22, Germany invaded the Soviet Union. In Tokyo, foreign minister Matsuoka quickly changed his view. He met with the Emperor and urged that Japan immediately follow suit. Germany would defeat the Soviet Union in a few weeks, he said, and using the Mussolini argument, noted that if Japan did not get involved in the war, Japan would get none of the spoils. After the fall of the USSR, Japan could then make its move south.

The military leadership did not agree. Japan could not fight one war in the north and another in the south. It would have to choose, and the Southern Road offered more in potential resources than the Northern Road did. The military privately agreed that if the Germans captured Moscow by the end of August, then they would indeed attack the USSR in the east, but they kept that decision to themselves. And in any case, as you know, that did not happen.

Berlin gave Matsuoka's position a boost by formally requesting Japanese assistance in the war against the Soviets on June 30, eight days into the conflict. But the military, and the prime minister, would not be swayed. South it must be.

Two days later, Prime Minister Konoe formally presented the southern plan to the Emperor. Step one would be the occupation of French Indochina. The government hoped this could be accomplished by diplomatic means, but if not, Japan would use force. The Emperor, per protocol, remained silent during this presentation, then applied the Imperial seal to the document.

Meanwhile, the military decided it had had its fill of Matsuoka and Tojo told the prime minister they wanted him out of the Cabinet. The difficulty was that he was popular after his triumphant visits to Berlin and Moscow, and his return with the non-aggression agreement. Konoe solved this problem by asking his entire Cabinet to resign. He then formed a new government by reappointing every one of his ministers, except Matsuoka.

[music: Traditional, "Matsurika"]

So much for negotiations with America. For a time, a peace agreement seemed almost in hand, although this was more the result of miscommunication than any real meeting of the minds. Then it all fell apart. To the Japanese, this was further confirmation that the Americans did not and would not respect Japan as an equal. To the Americans, this was further confirmation that the Japanese were treacherous and intent on war.

And while these discussions were in progress, the Americans further turned up the pressure on Japan when the Roosevelt Administration included China in its Lend-Lease policy. Most aid to China was in the form of trucks, construction equipment, and fuel, but there were also 100 American P-40 Hawk fighter aircraft and pilots to fly them. The pilots were American volunteers from the US Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, who were discharged from their services and immediately hired by a private contractor, which paid them double what they had been making in the military. Eleven of the volunteers were Chinese American.

These air units spent months in Burma training, then were deployed into three squadrons, two in Kunming and one in Rangoon; their primary mission was to provide air cover for the Burma Road. This force was formally known as the American Volunteer Group, or AVG. They painted their planes with a shark face on the front, including a prominent red mouth lined with sharp white teeth. The idea for this came from the Luftwaffe, where a unit that flew Me-110s gave their planes similar markings. They were supposed to look like sharks, although the nickname the unit acquired suggested a different animal; they were dubbed the Flying Tigers.

Chiang Kai-shek's wife, Madame Chiang, sometimes served as an interpreter between the Americans and the Chinese, for which she was made the honorary commander of the unit. The Flying Tigers did not get into actual combat until after the US entered the war, and six months later the unit was incorporated into the US Army Air Force, but they racked up impressive numbers in their brief time as an independent air force, destroying 297 Japanese aircraft at the cost of 22 of their own pilots killed, missing, or captured.

Back in Japan, one of the first acts of the new foreign minister, Toyoda Teijiro, was to cable the Japanese ambassador in Vichy and ask him to notify the French government that the Japanese Army was going to occupy Indochina on July 24, with or without the agreement of the French. The day before the deadline, the French government agreed to a peaceful surrender of control over the territory. The Japanese military would expand its presence throughout Indochina, including the strategic airfields at Da Nang and Bien Hoa and the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay. The exultant Japanese ambassador in Vichy sent this cable to the foreign ministry in Tokyo:

THE REASON WHY THE FRENCH SO READILY ACCEPTED THE JAPANESE DEMANDS WAS THAT THEY SAW HOW RESOLUTE WAS OUR DETERMINATION AND HOW SWIFT OUR WILL. IN SHORT, THEY HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO YIELD.

What the Japanese didn't know was that the Americans had broken their diplomatic code. When a copy of this telegram fell into the hands of Cordell Hull, he read it and was outraged by the arrogance and the triumphalism and took note of its clear implication that the Japanese regarded Indochina not as the last step, but as the first.

Hull urged tough action against the Japanese. On July 26, the Administration froze all Japanese assets in the United States. The governments of Canada and Britain and the Dutch government in exile soon followed suit. General Douglas MacArthur was put in command of US military forces in the Philippines, and the Americans began beefing up their defenses in the Pacific. The Roosevelt Administration took an even bigger step a few days later, on August 1, when it embargoed exports of petroleum products to Japan. Japan controlled no significant source of oil production and was reliant on the US for over 90% of its oil imports.

It was seen in the West as a shot across the bow; in Japan as an existential threat. It was meant to restrain Japan; instead, it strengthened the position of those who pushed for war.

The Japanese leadership apparently never considered the possibility of such a drastic response, though they should have. In the Japanese view, Japan had negotiated with the Vichy government for a peaceful occupation of Indochina, so what were the Americans so up in arms about? Japan was now surrounded by unfriendly nations: the Soviet Union, China, Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States. Japan at the moment had a larger navy in the region than Britain and America combined, but the naval buildup the US Congress had authorized a few years back would give the US naval superiority in the Pacific within another year or two.

Five days later, the Navy Chief of Staff, Admiral Nagano Osami, briefed the Emperor on the situation. The Japanese Navy's stockpile of oil would only last two years in peacetime, much less if Japan went to war. He noted that the Navy had always opposed the Tripartite Pact, seeing it as inevitably leading to tensions with the United States. Now there was no choice. Either submit to American demands, which would mean the extinction of the Japanese nation, or go to war against the United States. War with the US was risky, he acknowledged, and could well lead to defeat. Even so, defeat in war was preferable to submitting to the eradication of Japan without a fight. If it was to be war, Japan's best chance was to take the initiative against the Americans: to strike first, strike soon, and strike hard.

The Emperor had one question: Could this first strike potentially deliver a crushing victory, one such as the Navy had won at the Battle of the Tsushima Strait?

Nagano replied that would not be possible.

Then this war will be a desperate one, the Emperor concluded.

On September 6, the Cabinet met with the Emperor to discuss war. Prime Minister Konoe spoke passionately for further negotiation, but the military leaders drew a line. If negotiations with the United States could not produce an end to the oil embargo in a month, by October 10, then it must be war. The Emperor, whose role at these meetings was usually ceremonial, took out a piece of paper and read a poem composed by his grandfather, the Meiji Emperor. It was the poem which I read to you at the top of the episode. In choosing to recite this particular poem, with its unmistakable pacifist moral, the Emperor was putting not only the weight of his authority but that of his revered grandfather and the entire Imperial dynasty on the peace side of the scale. The military commanders present could scarcely oppose the Emperor, so they sheepishly conceded that naturally diplomacy should be the first recourse and the first priority. War could only be considered as a last resort.

That evening, the prime minister had dinner with Joseph Grew, the US ambassador to Japan. Such a dinner was a breach of protocol and both of them took pains to keep it secret. Earlier there had been some talk of a summit meeting between the American President and the Japanese prime minister in an effort to iron out their disagreements. Roosevelt had suggested Juneau, in Alaska, as the site of the meeting. Konoe now revived this idea with the ambassador; he suggested Honolulu, in Hawaii.

The ambassador forwarded a summary of this discussion to the State Department and urged that the US side agree to the meeting without preconditions. Japanese pride would never permit them to make a concession before the meeting, but if the meeting were held, much might change.

In Washington, the hawks in the Administration, led by Secretary of War Stimson and Secretary of the Navy Knox, prevailed upon the Secretary of State not to endorse this proposed meeting. Hull was inclined to agree with them. He feared Roosevelt would give away too much and that a summit meeting of this sort might turn into Munich Conference II. So in communications with the Japanese foreign ministry, Hull insisted on his already-stated preconditions, and the summit meeting never happened.

In Tokyo, the military extended their deadline for a negotiated settlement to October 15, but Tōjō reiterated the view of the Army that a complete withdrawal from China as a precondition to negotiations was unacceptable. The 15<sup>th</sup> came and went with no progress and no change in either America's position or the Army's position. Konoe resigned as prime minister. Since the government had fallen because the Army refused to support it, it was felt that Tōjō was the only possible choice as the new prime minister. If the Army would not support the government, then the Army must be the government. If Tōjō was not satisfied with anyone else's decisions, then let Tōjō take the decisions. And let Tōjō take the responsibility, one might add. He accepted the position, while retaining the portfolio of war minister.

In the United States, *The New York Times* welcomed the new Japanese government and hoped the chances for a negotiated settlement had increased. Secretary of State Hull was less enthusiastic, dismissing Tōjō as "a small-bore, straight-laced, one-track mind" that was "rather stupid."

Richard Sorge, a German journalist in Japan who was moonlighting as a Soviet spy, signaled to Moscow that the Japanese seemed determined to turn their ambitions southward, that war with the United States was probable, but that Japan would not attack the Soviet Union, at least not in the foreseeable future.

Sorge's intelligence was remarkably accurate and no doubt contributed to Stalin's decision to shift Red Army units from the Far East to the defense of Moscow. As for Sorge, the Japanese would arrest him just a few days later. He would be imprisoned, interrogated, tortured, and eventually hanged in 1944.

Chief of Naval Operations Harold Stark sent a warning to US commands in the Pacific that a Japanese attack might be forthcoming. He believed the Soviet Union was the more likely target, but he noted that an attack on British or US forces in the Western Pacific could not be ruled out, and ordered his commanders to "take due precautions."

The new Japanese prime minister met with the heads of the Army and Navy on October 23. Navy chief of staff Nagano complained that the government was hesitating while his Navy was

burning 400 tons of irreplaceable oil every hour. Tōjō insisted his government needed more time to study the matter.

The Navy remained leery of war, but Army chief Sugiyama Hajime was growing impatient with Tōjō, a career soldier who was suddenly talking an awful lot like a civilian. They met several times between October 23 and November 1. Sugiyama was adamant that negotiations were going nowhere and it was clear the Americans would never yield. Better to strike now, while Japan was strong, than wait for the Americans to build up their own military.

When the question was put to him, Navy chief Nagano agreed that if war was inevitable, the best time to begin it was right now. Sugiyama suggested early December, but also proposed that Japan continue with the negotiations right up to the outbreak of war, as a way to catch the Americans off guard. It was agreed that the diplomats would be given until November 29. If no agreement was reached, it would be war.

In Washington, military leaders warned that United States was not prepared for war with Japan. They advised the President that further Japanese moves against China or Thailand or the Soviet Union could not justify the United States going to war, since that would inevitably weaken America's ability to aid in the war against Hitler, which was the more important conflict.

On November 20, Japan made its final offer to the United States. Japan would agree to withdraw its military from southern Indochina and pledge not to move against any other country for six months. In return, the United States would lift the oil embargo. During this cooling-off period, both sides would reconsider their positions. The American response was more of the same: Japan must renounce the Tripartite Pact and withdraw from China. Only then would talks be possible.

On November 25, Roosevelt met with his military leaders. Thanks to American intercepts, he also knew that the Japanese government had set a deadline of November 29 for the negotiators. The 29<sup>th</sup> was a Saturday; Roosevelt noted that by Monday, December 1, America might be at war. "[T]he Japanese are notorious for attacking without warning. The question is how to maneuver them into firing the first shot without too much danger to ourselves." Roosevelt cited the example of Lincoln and Fort Sumter: make sure the entire world knew which side was the aggressor. The military agreed that the most likely targets of the first Japanese attack would be Malaya, Singapore, or Borneo. Possibly the Philippines, but they regarded this as less likely.

Navy Chief Stark sent a second warning to the US fleets in Hawaii and the Philippines, noting that a large number of naval task forces had left Japan. They were most likely targeting the Kra Peninsula, the Philippines, or Borneo.

In Japan on December 2, the Cabinet and the Army and Navy chiefs met with the Emperor for his approval to go to war. Prime minister Tōjō recounted the history of the failed negotiations with America. The US was acting in a stubborn and disrespectful manner, he said. The only way

Japan could preserve its position as a Great Power and hold onto the territories it had already taken was through war. War against the US, the UK, and the Netherlands.

The Emperor felt he had no choice. He affixed the Imperial seal to the government's war proposal.

Much is about to happen, but we'll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Timothy for his kind donation, and thank you to Sindri for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Timothy and Sindri help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. And it's that time of year again. The holidays are upon us, so let me just remind you that donations to and patronages of *The History of the Twentieth Century* make the perfect holiday gift, for me. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

The podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. Sometimes it's my own work, sometimes it's licensed, but many times, the music you hear here is free and downloadable. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

It's been my custom for the past few years to release a bonus Christmas episode. This is my gift to you, my listeners, to express my gratitude. Watch for that special episode, and I hope you'll join me next week, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as Japan is about to go to war with the United States. Climb Mount Niitaka, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. US Ambassador Grew sent multiple cables to the State Department urging that the President accept Prime Minister Konoe's invitation to a summit meeting without preconditions. Japan was taking the first step toward peace; it was churlish of the US government to insist that Japan concede on the most important points before the meeting even took place.

His urgings fell on deaf ears. He tried writing a "Dear Frank" letter directly to the President, to no avail. He passed along a rumor that in the event of war, the Japanese would attempt a surprise attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, which no one in Washington took seriously.

It would have been a very Roosevelt move for FDR to bypass the State Department and handle the situation with the Japanese himself. We've seen him make that move before. So had his Cabinet and officials in the State Department, so they did everything they could to discourage him; besides, Roosevelt was at this time preoccupied with his meeting with Winston Churchill

and the situation in the Atlantic and apparently content to leave relations with Japan in the hands of Cordell Hull.

There were those in Tokyo who opposed the summit as well. On September 18, four of them attempted to assassinate the prime minister, probably because they opposed his efforts to negotiate with the United States.

When Joseph Grew returned to the United States in 1942, after the war began, he asked Secretary of State Hull why the summit meeting proposal had been rejected. He told Hull it might have prevented the war. Hull replied, “If you thought so strongly, why didn’t you board a plane and come tell us?” Hull’s response left Grew wondering if the Secretary had even read his cables.

[music: Closing War Theme]