

Mistranslation of Decoded “Magic” Messages as a Contributing Factor in the Breakdown of U.S.–Japan Peace Talks in 1941

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“Magic” was the name given to the American decoding of the secret Japanese codes used in diplomatic communications before and during the Pacific War of 1941–1945. The argument is that in the final phase of the eight months of U.S.–Japan talks leading up to the attack on Pearl Harbor, serious mistranslations in Magic were a significant factor in the failure to reach an agreement. This was in addition to the cumulative effect of mutual misunderstandings which grew between the two sides over a longer period, to be covered in a subsequent thesis entitled “The Role of ‘Magic’ Distortions in ‘Crisis Management’ during the U.S.–Japan Peace Talks of 1941” in *Seijo University Economics Papers* (Keizai Kenkyu 経済研究) No.137, published by The Economics Institute of Seijo University. Both these theses are based on a comprehensive study by the author in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Oxford, 1994.¹⁾ In spite of the number of historians who take the opposite view, these theses argue that the efforts made by the participants on

1) Komatsu, Keiichiro 小松啓一郎. *Doctoral Thesis, Misunderstanding and Mistranslation in the Origins of the Pacific War of 1941–1945 : The Importance of “Magic”*, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford, 1994. It is also available for reference at Seijo Daigaku Toshokan 成城大学図書館 (Seijo University Library), Tokyo, and the British Library (Daiei Toshokan 大英図書館), London.

both sides to achieve a successful outcome and avert military conflict, or at least to delay the outbreak of the war until the following March of 1942, might have been much closer to achieving success than is generally believed up to now.

The later stages of the crisis were specifically precipitated by the exchange, and misinterpretation, of key proposals by both sides. In early November the Japanese prepared a “Plan for Negotiation with the U.S.” (Taibei Kosho Yoryo 对米交渉要領), consisting of Proposal A (ko-an 甲案) and Proposal B (otsu-an 乙案). On the American side, the so-called “Hull Note” was presented by Secretary of State Cordell Hull to Japan in late November. The critical point of the latter was the omission of a part, the “modus vivendi”, which was in effect a temporary compromise that could have delayed any action until March of the following year.

As is widely recognised by observers, there were three main areas of dispute during the negotiations : firstly, the question of non-discrimination in trade, secondly the Tripartite Pact of September 1940 between Germany, Italy and Japan, and thirdly the issue of Japan’s withdrawal from China. In all three of these important areas, mistranslations of Magic materials gave the U.S. false or distorted information regarding Japan’s intentions.

One of the most serious distortions among many others²⁾ concerned the very issue of Japan’s willingness to compromise on these three points. Proposal A (presented by Japan on November 7th) in the Magic translation has a meaning which is opposite to that of the original text. The Magic version of Telegram #726 has the establishment of a fourth item : “(4) As a matter of principle, we are anxious to avoid having this inserted in the draft of the formal proposal reached between Japan and

2) See *ibid.*

the United States ...”, but no such item exists in the original Japanese text. This is the result of a mistranslation from the original sentence, “Moreover, concerning the [Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s] Four Principles, avoid to the utmost including these in a formal agreement ...” As pointed out by the Defence at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (the Tokyo Trial).

This paragraph in the intercepted message is given a separate number, (4), thereby making it appear coordinate with (1) Non-discrimination in Trade, (2) Interpretation and Application of the Tripartite Pact, and (3) Withdrawal of Troops. By thus seeming to be one of the main divisions of the message and cognate with the others, and by the omission of the words “the four principles” and instead referring to anxiety to avoid having “this” included in the agreement, this clause of course says that the Japanese will try to escape committing themselves to a formal agreement embodying the points which they have proposed above—all of them.³⁾

THE NON-DISCRIMINATION PRINCIPLE

Concerning the non-discrimination principle with regard to China, in the original telegram Japan interpreted the U.S.’s position to the effect that “it would not be wise for either Japan or the United States to adopt one policy in a particular region while adopting an opposing policy in another region”. The Magic interpreter, however, mistranslated this as :

3) Kyokuto Kokusai Gunji Saiban Sokki-roku 極東國際軍事裁判速記録, (Japanese Record of Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East), Vol. 9, Court House of the Tribunal War Ministry Building, Tokyo, Japan, Yushodo Shoten 雄松堂書店, Tokyo, 1968, p. 596. The English version (Blakeney summation) is quoted by Huddleston in correspondence : Huddleston, Jackson Noyes Jr., unpublished essay : Aspects of Japanese-American Negotiations, November 1 to November 25, 1941, p. 25.

“it might be feasible for either country within a certain specified area to adopt a given policy and for the other party within another specified area to adopt a complementary policy”.⁴⁾

This has misled even historians, including F. C. Jones who concluded wrongly in his post-war publication that : “Togo intimated that while the question of non-discrimination in trade was put on a world-wide basis, the Japanese Government really wanted a regional agreement, and he supposed that understanding could easily be reached on this”.⁵⁾ However, Japanese Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo 東郷茂徳 himself wrote in his memoirs : “It was hard to understand why, while Hull insisted that ‘equality of commercial opportunity’ would soon be applied to the whole world, China’s ‘equality of commercial opportunity’ should not be applied at the same time [since the idea of China’s application at the same time as for the rest of the world was a Japanese concept rejected by the U.S. when they insisted on the earlier application for China]...”⁶⁾

THE TRIPARTITE PACT

With regard to her membership in the Tripartite Pact, Japan repeatedly tried to emphasise that she would act “independently” from Germany, and not participate “automatically” in the European War, in the event of the U.S. entering it against Germany.⁷⁾ Her intention to act “in-

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- 4) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941 日本外交文書—日米交渉 1941 (Japanese Foreign Affairs Documents—U.S.—Japan Negotiations in 1941), 2 vols., Gaimu-sho 外務省 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 1990, Vol. 2, p. 71. Cf. The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, Department of Defense, Washington D.C., 1978, Appendix, p. A-15.
 - 5) Jones, F. C. *Japan’s New Order in East Asia : Its Rise and Fall 1937–45*, Oxford University Press, London, 1954, p. 299.
 - 6) Togo, Shigenori 東郷茂徳. *Jidai no Ichimen 時代の一面* (A Dimension of the Times), Chuokoron-sha 中央公論社, Tokyo, 1989, p. 371.
 - 7) Kurusu, Saburo 来栖三郎. *Homatsu no 35 nen—Nichibei Kosho Hishi*

dependently”, i.e. in reality to walk out from the Tripartite Pact, was mentioned in two telegrams in Japanese sent from Tokyo to Ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura 野村吉三郎 in Washington in mid–November. In the first (#773),⁸⁾ the term “independently” was mistranslated by Magic as “automatically”.⁹⁾ In the second (#800),¹⁰⁾ the last part containing the term “independently” was abbreviated.¹¹⁾

The mistranslation of “automatically” for “independently” was particularly serious in view of the fact that Japan and Germany had struggled for many years over this very issue. Of course, Secretary of State Hull could not know from the intercepts about this serious mistranslation, which virtually reversed the meaning of the original text. Consequently, he states in his memoirs :

The following day Kurusu [Saburo Kurusu 来栖三郎, the Ambassador sent in November 1941 to Washington] came alone to see me and handed me a formula that he said clarified Japan’s obligations under the Tripartite Alliance. This merely recited Kurusu’s personal interpretation, given from his viewpoint as the man who had signed the treaty for Japan. He declared that Japan herself could interpret her obligations under the Pact ... I said I did not think the paper he had handed me would be of any particular help, and so dismissed it.¹²⁾

It is not surprising that Hull judged it as “merely ... Kurusu’s personal interpretation” and therefore that it could not be “any particular

泡沫の35年—日米交渉秘史 (35 Years in Vain—The Hidden History of U.S.–Japan Negotiations), Chuokoron-sha 中央公論社, Tokyo, 1986 (originally published in 1948), p. 104.

8) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 144.

9) The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A–82.

10) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 163–4.

11) Huddleston, op. cit., pp. 41–2.

12) Hull, Cordell. The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, Vol. 2, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., Norwich, 1948, p. 1071.

help” because he had already read the content of the mistranslated Magic versions. Kurusu himself notes in his memoirs that he offered his proposal under instruction from Telegram #800 sent the day before.¹³⁾ Thus an important chance to take into account the new proposal presented by Tokyo was missed. Professor Chihiro Hosoya 細谷千博 observes that :

Japanese leaders seem to have taken for granted that their real purpose had been made clear to the United States by the two messages they had sent and by their failure to supply aid to Germany. Therefore Foreign Minister Togo was surprised when Hull insisted in a talk with Ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura that Japan must clearly indicate that if it entered into an agreement with the United States, “the Tripartite Pact would automatically become a dead letter.” It was evident that the Japanese leaders had failed to communicate their position to the American officials.¹⁴⁾

It was, in any case, impossible “to communicate their position to the American officials” when the Americans had secretly read and uncritically accepted the Magic translations which persistently changed the meaning of the original term “independently” to “automatically”. Hull wrote later in 1948, “it required very little scrutiny to see that they [the conditions in Proposal B] were utterly unacceptable ... [and] ... on their face were extreme”. He also stated that “The President and I could only conclude that ... no responsible American official could ever have dreamed of accepting them”.¹⁵⁾

13) S. Kurusu, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, pp. 163–4.

14) See Hosoya, Chihiro 細谷千博. “The Role of Japan’s Foreign Ministry and Its Embassy in Washington”, in Borg, Dorothy and Okamoto, Shumpei, eds. *Pearl Harbor as History : Japanese–American Relations, 1931–1941*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1973, pp. 161–2.

15) C. Hull, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, pp. 1068–70.

Even during the post-war period, a number of historians have maintained the same view as Hull towards the nature of the Proposal at that time. For instance, in his publication of 1965, with “the authorization of [Secretary of the Treasury] Henry Morgenthau”,¹⁶⁾ John Blum of Yale University states, without recognising the issue of these mistranslations, that “in the event of American participation in the European war, Japan would ‘automatically carry out what she understands to be the obligations’ of the Axis Pact” while “It [Proposal B, presented on November 20th] obligated the United States to unfreeze Japanese assets, to lift the embargo on oil”. Blum emphasises that “MAGIC’s window on that development confirmed the distaste of Roosevelt and Hull for any consideration of Plan B”.¹⁷⁾ If it is the case that the views of Morgenthau and Blum about the influence of Magic on the thinking of the decision makers are accurate, the confusion between “independently” and “automatically” created by the English version of the intercepts played a fatal role in the formation of U.S. decision-making.

WITHDRAWAL FROM CHINA

Regarding “the Japanese troops sent to China during the China Incident”, Tokyo offered in the proposals to withdraw from the rest of China, except North China, Inner Mongolia and Hainan 海南 Island, “simultaneously with the establishment of peace in accordance with arrangements to be made between Japan and China, and the withdrawal will be completed within two years”. Regarding those specific areas, Tokyo stated that the troops “will remain for a necessary period of time after the establishment of peace between Japan and China”¹⁸⁾ and added in

16) Blum, John Morton. *From the Morgenthau Diaries (Vol. 2) Years of Urgency 1938–1941*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1965, p. vi.

17) *Ibid.*, p. 383.

18) *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941*, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 71.

the Note of the Item that “in case the United States asks what the ‘necessary period of time’ will be, we will respond that we have in mind 25 years”. However, the Magic translation of the Note is: “Should the American authorities question you in regard to ‘the suitable period’, answer vaguely that such a period should encompass 25 years”.¹⁹⁾ As noted by Jackson Noyes Huddleston Jr. of the University of Washington, “The implied deceptiveness in the MAGIC translation ‘vaguely’ does not exist in the ‘original’. Such a mistake could only add to Secretary Hull’s belief in the insincerity of the Japanese”.²⁰⁾

Regarding the definition of the “necessary period”, there were in fact various opinions in Tokyo, from the hardest, 99 years, to the softest, five years. Foreign Minister Togo judged that the domestic situation was far from the point of reaching a “unanimous agreement” at this stage, although Japan should “satisfy the desire of the United States by making the evacuation of troops a fundamental principle” and “delineate the area and duration” to “dispel their doubt”. Thus, he decided to suggest “25 years” at this stage, if the worst came to the worst. He was, of course, fully aware that “25 years” of occupation was too extreme to be accepted by the United States, and he confirmed with Prime Minister Hideki Tojo 東條英機 that “should the U.S. Government respond positively to either Proposal A or Proposal B, Japan would have to make a further compromise”. Togo’s goal was “five years”, and “25 years” was

Sanbo Honbu 参謀本部 (General Staff of the Army). Sugiyama Memo (Jo) 杉山メモ (上) (Sugiyama Memorandum (Vol.1)), Hara Shobo 原書房, Tokyo, 1989 (hereafter Sugiyama Memo 杉山メモ Vol. 1), p. 379.

Ike, Nobutaka. *Japan’s Decision for War—Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1967, pp. 209–10.

19) The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A–14.

20) Huddleston, op. cit., p. 24.

in his mind a tentative idea.²¹⁾ This was why he instructed Ambassador Nomura "at this time to negotiate strictly on the abstract term 'necessary time'" and explained that "if we were to state clearly the necessary period for stationing troops, rather than clarifying the matter, we fear it would confuse the situation".²²⁾

This part of the message, which indicated the sensitivity of the issue, was completely omitted by the Magic translator. Instead, phrases were added which did not exist in the original text: "On the matter of duration of occupation, whenever pressed to give a clear statement we have hitherto couched our answers in vague terms. I want you in as indecisive yet as pleasant language as possible to euphemise".²³⁾ None of these terms: "whenever", "pressed", "hitherto", "vague", "indecisive", "yet", "as pleasant as possible", or "euphemise" can be seen in the original text.

Furthermore, when Togo instructed Nomura to "make every effort to impress them with the fact that we do not intend to station troops indefinitely or permanently",²⁴⁾ this earnest tone was missed in the Magic version. The English version gives the impression of simply playing with words and appears to suggest deceptiveness; "try to impart to them the effect that unlimited occupation does not mean perpetual occupation".²⁵⁾

21) Shigenori Togo, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

See also Japanese Record of Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Vol. 9, *op. cit.*, p. 602.

Kase, Toshikazu 加瀬俊一. *Nihon Gaiko-shi 23—Nichi-Bei Koshō 日本外交史 23—日米交渉 (A History of Japan's Foreign Policy Vol. 23—U.S.—Japan Negotiations)*, Kashima Kenkyusho Shuppan-kai 鹿島研究所出版会. Tokyo, 1970., p. 260.

22) *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichihei Koshō 1941*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–2.

23) *The "Magic" Background of Pearl Harbor*, Vol. 4, *op. cit.*, Appendix, p. A–15.

24) *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichihei Koshō 1941*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

25) *The "Magic" Background of Pearl Harbor*, Vol. 4, *op. cit.*, Appendix, p. A–

PROPOSAL A AS “FINAL”

Proposal A was described as the “final proposal” in the Magic version of Telegram #726 of November 4th although the original Japanese term “saishuteki joho—an 最終的讓步案” cannot be the equivalent of a “final proposal” in the meaning of the term in English, since, as the subsequent Magic version of #727 of the same day itself correctly translated, Proposal B was prepared as a “substitute plan” in the event “If there appears to be a remarkable difference between the Japanese and American view [on Proposal A]”. Although the Magic translator accurately translated the part mentioned above, Proposal B in the Magic version of #727 is again exaggerated as “the idea of making a last effort to prevent something happening”, while the phrase “a last effort” does not exist in the original Japanese text.²⁶⁾ One point which became clear from the testimony of State Department Representative Joseph W. Ballantine at the Tokyo Trial is that “the knowledge gained from this intercept [#726] vitiated the State Department’s belief in the sincerity of the Japanese and that, subsequently, the State Department was on its guard”.²⁷⁾

Magic also decoded Telegram #762 of the 11th from Tokyo to Nomura. The Magic version, again, contains mistranslations which could have only confused the American decision makers with regard to

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- 26) This part of the original telegram states that “the contents of our second proposal [Proposal B]” was “drawn up with the thought in mind that it is better to prevent something from happening before it arises”. Cf. *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho–Nichibei Kosho* 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 72, and *The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor*, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A–16. Thus, the original text indicates that the purpose in preparing Proposal B was not to present Japan’s “last” proposal, but rather to prevent a breakdown in the negotiations. As Huddleston notes, “The concept of a *modus vivendi* is clearly expressed in the “original”. Correspondence, Huddleston, op. cit., p. 30.
- 27) Quoted by Huddleston, *ibid.*, p. 14.

the status of Proposal A. The phrases of the original text, the “latest proposal” (saigo-an 最後案) and “Proposal A under our latest instruction” (saigo kunrei Ko-an 最後訓令甲案), were translated as “our final proposal” and “our final Proposal A”, although the term “saigo 最後” obviously was meant in the sense of “the latest” in the context of the original text.²⁸⁾ The term “saigo” can indeed mean “last” (hence “final”), but that sense is not logically appropriate here since, as was quite clearly stated in Telegram #781 of the 15th, “we have not as yet presented our ‘B’ proposal to the United States”. The logical inconsistency was not noted by the Magic translators who, in the same #781, again mistranslated “saigo-an” as “a final proposal”, reinforcing the already exaggerated impression of Japan’s aggressive attitude.²⁹⁾

Immediately after the proposals were formally adopted at the Gozen Kaigi of November 5th, Togo again sent the contents of Proposals A and B to Nomura (#735 and #736).³⁰⁾ At this time he instructed him to maintain a friendly attitude for the purpose of making every effort to reach agreement with the U.S., by avoiding giving any impression of a “deadline” or ultimatum. He also sent a message instructing Nomura to keep in mind that Japan needed to sign an agreement with the U.S. by November 25th. Magic intercepted them and recognised November 25th as being the Japanese “deadline”,³¹⁾ but made serious mistranslations and distortions. The original Japanese term “[presentation of Proposal

28) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho–Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 104.
The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A–39.

29) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho–Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 146.
The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A–61.

30) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho–Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 74–81.
The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A–21, p. A–22.

31) C. Hull, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 1056.

B] as a means of overcoming final barriers" was mistranslated as "our [Japanese] absolutely final proposal". The Americans also had no means of knowing that November 25th was not defined as the deadline at the conference in Tokyo but rather "the 25th" was deliberately mentioned by Togo as a personal tactic to push Nomura to try to reach an agreement more quickly because Nomura, in Togo's view, tended to move too slowly.³²⁾

Hull states in his memoirs that :

For the first time we now saw a deadline stated in the intercepts. In a message to Nomura on November 5, Togo said : "Because of various circumstances, it is absolutely necessary that all arrangements for the signing of this agreement be completed by the 25th of this month"... This, to us, could mean only one thing. Japan had already set in motion the wheels of her war machine, and she had decided not to stop short of war with the United States if by November 25 we had not agreed to her demands.³³⁾

Although the real deadline was set for December 1st in Tokyo,³⁴⁾ which was only six days later than November 25th, this difference was quite significant when one considers the following facts. First, Hull had decided to remove the *modus vivendi* from the Hull Note by the early hours in the morning of the 26th after much consideration,³⁵⁾ and clearly indicated to Secretary of War Henry Stimson later the same morning that war had become inevitable because the *modus vivendi* was re-

32) Shigenori Togo, *op. cit.*, pp. 331-2.

33) C. Hull, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, pp. 1056-7.

34) Sugiyama Memo 杉山メモ, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, pp. 417-18.

35) Feis, Herbert. *The Road to Pearl Harbor : The Coming of the War Between the United States and Japan*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1950, p. 317.

Wohlstetter, Roberta. *Pearl Harbor—Warning and Decision*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1962, p. 242.

moved. Second, one factor which promoted Hull’s decision was his belief that Proposal B was the “absolutely final proposal” described in the Magic translation, although as already mentioned it could still constitute a Japanese “modus vivendi” proposal.³⁶⁾ Japanese primary sources clearly prove that, even after receiving the Hull Note, there was still a complicated process and significant resistance before Tokyo reached the decision to go to war. In fact, the formal Japanese decision to open hostilities was not made until the Gozen Kaigi of December 1st, the real deadline set at the conference of November 5th. As observed by Roberta Wohlstetter (the author of *Pearl Harbor—Warning and Decision*³⁷⁾ in 1962), “He [Hull] continued to mourn the fate of the modus vivendi”³⁸⁾ even after he handed the Hull Note to the Japanese ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu. Thus there was still time and room to reconsider a modus vivendi.

MISINTERPRETED TONE OF MAGIC

There are many instances of Magic hardening the tone of the original telegrams. For example, the Magic version of #725, which explained the general background and the Japanese intentions in preparation of the proposals, contains several misconceptions of this kind. The original phrase : “As a result of sincere, careful deliberation, we have decided to continue the negotiations” is translated in the Magic version as : “we have decided as a result of these deliberations, to gamble once more on the continuance of the parleys”. Although Japan’s sincerity towards the

36) T. Kase, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

See also Japanese Record of Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Vol. 9, *op. cit.*, p. 602. Shigenori Togo, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

37) Wohlstetter, Roberta. *op. cit.*

38) *Ibid.*, p. 269.

negotiations was emphasised in the whole of the original text, the Magic interpreter gave an image of Japan as a reckless gambler by adding phrases such as "to gamble once more" and "the parleys".

Similarly, another sentence attached to the original text : "the success or failure of the present negotiations will have an enormous influence on ... the fate of our empire [Japan]" is converted by the interpreter to : "In fact, we gambled the fate of our land on the throw of this die". Again, the words "gambled" and "the throw of this die" do not exist in the original text. The original text also states that : "Because we desire to talk over a peaceful adjustment of the situation, as we enter into the last stages of the negotiations, we earnestly hope the United States government will turn about and reconsider seriously from an over-all view of maintaining Japanese-American relations and will use discretion in considering this extremely grave state of affairs". The Magic version, however, translated it in a very different tone : "It is to be hoped earnestly that looking forward to what may come at the end—at the last day of Japanese-American negotiations—the government of the United States will think ever so soberly how much better it would be to make peace with us ; how much better this would be for the whole world situation". It is clear that the sense of earnest sincerity for "a peaceful adjustment of the situation" in the original text was completely missed by the Magic translations. The impression given by the Magic version is that the Japanese were flaunting their strength before the Americans. In this sense, the Magic version could be seen as no less than a threat to the Americans.

One should be aware of the obvious fact that those messages including Telegram #725 were drawn up by the officials of the Tokyo Foreign Office for their colleagues in Washington as private messages, and were not assumed to be read by the Americans. Therefore, the sense of

sincerity in the original message #725 was not part of propaganda. In the same context, to the Japanese foreign officials it certainly did not make any sense to flaunt their strength before their colleagues. Here, the translated version is one example of misinterpretation, amongst a number of others, which was caused by the interpreter’s stereotyped image of the Japanese. Thus, the consequence was an accumulation of overtones in the decoded version. After carefully examining those distortions and overtones in the English version of #725, Ben Blakeney of the Defence at the Tokyo Trial stated that “it is the whole spirit which is wrong”.³⁹⁾

It is interesting to observe how effectively the Magic misconceptions could influence the formation of fixed images in readers who already had some pre-conceptions of the pre-war Japanese and their culture. Examples which show such an influence can be found even in the works of post-war scholars. Roberta Wohlstetter, for instance, comments about Telegram #725 that “The manner of saying this—‘a throw of the die,’ ‘the brink of chaos,’—was also dramatically urgent, even if somewhat alien to the American mode of speech”⁴⁰⁾ without realising that both of them were invented by the American interpreter and were not used by the Japanese officials. In fact, the latter phrase: “will ... be the brink of chaos” should read correctly in the original text: “will face a rupture”. It is not surprising that the contemporary American leaders who had access to the intercepts were not sympathetic to the Japanese position.

As a more specific example Wohlstetter quotes telegram #725 :

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- 39) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho–Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 69–70. The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, pp. A–12–A–13. Ben Blakeney’s statement is quoted by Huddleston in his unpublished essay, op. cit., p. 18.
- 40) Wohlstetter, op. cit., p. 194.

"Well, relations between Japan and the United States have reached the edge, and our [Japanese] people are losing confidence in the possibility of ever adjusting them". She comments on telegram #725 in general terms that : "There is no doubt about the meaning of this cable"⁴¹⁾ while she is not aware of the fact that, as pointed out by John Toland, "Such pessimism was not in the original". In fact, the original phrase should read correctly : "Strenuous efforts are being made day and night to adjust Japanese-American relations, which are on the verge of rupture".⁴²⁾

Telegram #764 of November 12th from Foreign Minister Togo to Ambassador Nomura conveyed the gist of a conversation Togo had had with the British Ambassador in Tokyo. There are, however, mistranslations. The most serious one is the translated sentence in the English version : "A speedy settlement can be made depending entirely upon the attitude of Britain and the United States", while it should read correctly that : "depending on what the attitude of Britain and the United States is, there is a way to swift agreement". Thus, while Togo only expressed the realities of the situation, the Magic interpreter gave an impression, by adding the term "entirely", that Togo tried to place responsibility completely on Britain and the United States. Again, the word "entirely" does not exist in the original version. Togo's sense of sincerity in his effort to avoid a conflict was emphasised in the original text and greatly impressed the British Ambassador, but was missed in the Magic version. Even the original phrase "kikyoku o kaihi 危局を回避", which means "to avoid a crisis", was missed by the interpreter who translated it as "to ride out the crisis".⁴³⁾

41) Ibid., pp. 193-4.

42) Toland, John. *The Rising Sun—The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire 1936-1945*, Random House, New York, 1970, p. 168.

43) *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941*, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 107.
The "Magic" Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A-

On November 7th Secretary of State Hull argued in the U.S. Cabinet that “from the tone of the intercepts”, a Japanese attack on the U.S. was imminent.⁴⁴⁾ On the same day when Ambassador Nomura submitted Proposal A to Hull, the Secretary of State judged that “the proposals ... are merely rewordings of the previous Japanese points. They contain nothing basically new, nor do they offer any real concessions”.⁴⁵⁾

As Herbert Feis observes, “Earnestly he [Nomura] presented Proposal A” to the Secretary of State at the meeting of the 7th. In sharp contrast, Hull did not pay any reasonable attention to it but only “a rapid glance at the contents” since he thought that he “already knew” it through the Magic intercept.⁴⁶⁾ The reality was, as noted by Professor Toshikazu Kase 加瀬俊一, that Hull knew only the “strikingly misinterpreted content” of Proposal A.⁴⁷⁾

In addition, one should recognise that this event shows another problem of using decoded intercepts for diplomacy, separate from the issue of misinterpretations. Whatever the conditions contained in Proposal A, virtually no diplomat could ever have been interested in considering them sincerely, when one knew in advance that one’s adversary had already prepared Proposal B and was going to present the new one in the event of an American refusal of Proposal A. This problem would not have been caused if the American diplomats had not had access to the intercepts. In this sense, the Japanese efforts to reach an agreement made for thirteen days between the date of presentation of Proposal A, the 7th, and that of Proposal B, the 20th, were consequently entirely wasted during this crucial period. Although Foreign Minister Togo met

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44) C. Hull, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 1057.

45) Ibid., p. 1058.

46) Feis, op. cit., p. 303.

47) T. Kase, op. cit., p. 266.

Ambassador Joseph Grew in Tokyo on the 10th in his effort to avoid any miscommunications, and although he presented him an English text of Proposal A prepared by the Japanese government,⁴⁸⁾ there was little likelihood of Togo being able to bring the American decision-maker’s attention to the text, partly because Grew’s information itself had been discredited in Washington.⁴⁹⁾ In the end, Proposal A was, as observed by Feis, “in truth, dead before it was delivered”.⁵⁰⁾

Indeed, Professor Paul Schroeder was given the impression that “There can be little doubt that not only Nomura and Kurusu in Washington, but also Togo and Tojo were earnestly trying to gain acceptance of the Japanese proposition and thus striving, within limits, to reach an agreement with the United States and avert war”.⁵¹⁾ However, the misleading over-emphases in the Magic version such as “inevitable”, “impossible” instead of “very difficult (shinan 至難)”, and “entirely unsuitable” instead of “not suitable” (#844) failed to express Japan’s hope for reaching an agreement. The author thinks that this perception gap can be attributed to neither Togo nor Hull. This is because the author himself is given the same impression of the telegram as Togo described from its original Japanese text, and the same impression of it as Hull described from its Magic version in English.

In the case of Telegram #812 Magic caused further confusion in the

48) See Nihon Gaiko Bunsho–Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 98.
The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A-33.

49) Komatsu, op. cit., pp. 178–80.

50) Feis, op. cit., p. 304.

51) Schroeder, Paul W. *The Axis Alliance and Japanese–American Relations*, 1941, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1958, p. 76.
Schroeder is considered by Robert Dallek to take “a middle ground” between the extremist views on U.S.–Japan relations before the War. See Dallek, Robert. *The Roosevelt Diplomacy and World War II*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1970, p. 44.

Mistranslation of Decoded “Magic” Messages

U.S.–Japan peace negotiations. One of the original sentences, “While maintaining the prearranged policy, the Japanese government is going to intensively do its best [in our negotiations with the United States] with sincerity and reason [jori 情理] to overcome the current difficult barriers as far as any hope still remains, and by doing so the government wishes to avert the crisis in U.S.–Japan relations” was mistranslated in the Magic version as “Stick to your fixed policy and do your best. Spare no efforts and try to bring about the solution we desire”. This distortion was the result of many serious mistakes, including the transposition of the grammatical subjects “ambassadors” and “Japanese government”. Also, the date of “the 29th” was mentioned only once in the original text, but it is noticeably repeated in the Magic translation. In addition, the date “25th”, which was mentioned in the previous message of November 5th, was also added in the Magic translation, although it was not mentioned in the original text. Thus, the concept of “deadline” was over-emphasised in the tone of the Magic translation. Consequently, Secretary of State Hull later stated in his work :

An intercepted message from Tokyo to Nomura and Kurusu on that day, November 22, confirmed my belief. This message extended the deadline from November 25 to 29. After that, war. “Stick to our [sic] fixed policy and do your very best,” it said. “Spare no efforts, and try to bring about the solution we desire. There are reasons beyond your ability to guess why we wanted to settle Japanese–American relations by the 25th ; but ... you can finish your conversations ... by the 29th (let me write it out for you—twenty–ninth) ... the deadline absolutely cannot be changed. After that things are automatically going to happen” ... It was in the shadow of that phrase—“after that things are automatically going to happen”—that we labored desperately during the next two weeks, striving to the last for peace or at least more

time.⁵²⁾

Professor T. Kase, who actually drew up this message as secretary to the Foreign Minister, has not agreed with the interpreter’s translation. Kase states that “It is open to say that the interpreter deliberately aimed at breaking down the negotiations”.⁵³⁾ Some historians who use only the English Magic version of the messages still misunderstand the issue of the “deadline”, even in the post-war period. Wohlstetter, for instance, states that “It set the deadline forward to November 25 for the Japanese ambassadors in America to accomplish their task [as a result of the discussions at the Gozen Kaigi of November 5th] ... Later the November 25 deadline was changed to November 29⁵⁴⁾”, despite the fact that the primary source, the Sugiyama Memo 杉山メモ, records that the deadline was set forward to December 1st at the Gozen Kaigi of the same day.⁵⁵⁾

APPOINTMENT OF AMBASSADOR KURUSU TO WASHINGTON

During the afternoon of November 3rd Foreign Minister Togo considered sending Saburo Kurusu to the U.S.⁵⁶⁾ This was a personal idea of Togo’s to support Ambassador Nomura in Washington in his efforts to reach an agreement.⁵⁷⁾ In the early hours of November 4th, Togo invited Kurusu to the official residence of the Foreign Minister.⁵⁸⁾ Togo asked Kurusu to accept Togo’s plan to transfer him to the U.S., although Togo

52) C. Hull, Vol. 2, op. cit., p.1074.

53) T. Kase, op. cit., p. 279.

54) See Wohlstetter, op. cit., p. 349.

55) Sugiyama Memo 杉山メモ, Vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 417–18.

56) Shigenori Togo, op. cit., p. 336.

57) Ibid.

58) S. Kurusu, op. cit., p. 17.

Shigenori Togo, op. cit., p. 337.

predicted that it would be dangerous for Kurusu if the negotiations failed and war broke out.⁵⁹⁾ After a little hesitation, Kurusu accepted the assignment,⁶⁰⁾ and the next afternoon Kurusu met Togo to ask for support for Kurusu’s family in case war broke out.⁶¹⁾

While the sincerity of Kurusu’s support for Nomura in peace talks with the U.S. is now widely known, Hull stated in his memoirs even after the war that “Foreign Minister Togo on November 3rd instructed Saburo Kurusu, former Japanese Ambassador to Germany, to come to Washington ostensibly to assist Nomura in his conversations with me [Hull]”.⁶²⁾ There is no documentary evidence to indicate that the Japanese leaders were seriously worried that Kurusu’s career as the former German ambassador could have negative consequences in the U.S.–Japan talks. Kurusu records in his memoirs that his career as the former German ambassador was considered, after much discussion at the meeting of the 4th, as an advantage in explaining to the Americans about the Japanese stance and obligations under the Tripartite Pact even though some possibility of a “handicap” was also predicted.⁶³⁾ In the case of Foreign Minister Togo, his work, written after the end of the war, does not even mention the discussion of the issue itself.⁶⁴⁾

Two significant problems among many other points can clearly be recognised here. One is that, as far as Japan’s real intention in sending Kurusu to Washington is concerned, Hull’s judgement was definitely unsound. The other point is that Japan’s failure to take into serious consideration the impression given by Kurusu’s career in Germany in

59) Ibid.

60) Ibid.

S. Kurusu, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

61) Shigenori Togo, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

62) C. Hull, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 1056.

63) S. Kurusu, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

64) Shigenori Togo, *op. cit.*, pp. 336–9.

itself indicates that the Japanese leaders obviously underestimated the American leaders’ hatred of Nazi Germany.

In fact, Hull emphasised at the meeting of November 18th with the Japanese ambassadors that “Our people do not trust Hitler ... We feel that, if Hitler won out, he inevitably would get around to the Far East and double-cross Japan”.⁶⁵⁾ Kurusu was surprised by the strong anti-German tone of Hull’s speech and realised that Hull’s hatred of Germany was much deeper than the Japanese had expected.⁶⁶⁾

When the two ambassadors, Nomura and Kurusu, met Hull and Roosevelt on the previous day, Hull felt “from the start that he [Kurusu] is deceitful. Knowing what I [Hull] did of Japan’s intentions from the intercepts ...”,⁶⁷⁾ in contrast, Kurusu felt encouraged by Roosevelt’s attitude, according to Telegram #1133 of the 18th.⁶⁸⁾

Similarly, according to Telegram #1160 of the 23rd sent from the Embassy in Washington to Tokyo, and Kurusu’s memoirs, Hull replied to Kurusu that he supported Kurusu’s proposal, withdrawal from the Tripartite Pact, as “quite a good idea (sukoburu myo—an 頗ル妙案)”⁶⁹⁾ and that there was “one person with whom he wished to consult” about the idea. Although Hull would not say with whom he wished to consult, Kurusu felt that Hull’s attitude was nevertheless “quite friendly”.⁷⁰⁾ Hull himself, however, as already mentioned, wrote later that he had “dismissed” Kurusu’s proposal. Whatever Hull’s true intention, his attitude described in Kurusu’s reports, recorded both before Pearl Harbor and after the War, was quite different from what Hull recognised him-

65) C. Hull, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 1064.

66) S. Kurusu, op. cit., p. 93.

67) C. Hull, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 1062.

68) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 157.

69) Ibid., p. 175.

S. Kurusu, op. cit., p. 106.

70) Ibid., p. 105.

self in his memoirs. Hull’s reaction to Kurusu’s visit was indeed more serious than Kurusu could imagine at the time : “After this visit from Kurusu and his statement ... I [Hull] redoubled, in conversations with the individuals in authority in Washington—among them Admiral Stark—my warnings that Japan might attack at any time”.⁷¹⁾

As Hull himself emphasised, the Magic translation actually implied deceit and that there was a covert purpose to Kurusu’s trip. An example of such mistranslations in the intercepts can be found in the English version of the Japanese message #739 which was originally sent from Tokyo to Ambassador Nomura on November 6th, and was translated by the Magic interpreter on the same day, U.S. Eastern Standard Time. This message is important since “the reason why we [the Japanese] are sending Ambassador Kurusu to you [Nomura in Washington] so quickly” is clearly explained in it.

The Magic translation read : “To make it sound good, we are telling the public that he is coming to help you quickly compose the unhappy relations between the two nations”. The Defence’s translation presented at the Tokyo Trial is, however, much closer to its original text : “It has been explained to the public here that, in view of the necessity of the negotiations being speedily brought to a successful conclusion, Ambassador Kurusu has been hurriedly dispatched to assist you”. Thus, it is clear that the Magic version implies deceit by adding some phrases including the one “To make it sound good”. It is, in the Defence’s category, “insidious distortion”. In fact, those phrases such as “To make it sound good” and “the unhappy relations” are not used in its original text.⁷²⁾ In

71) C. Hull, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 1071.

72) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho–Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 85. The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, *op. cit.*, Appendix, p. A–17. The Defence’s translation and its category of “distortion” are quoted by Huddleston in his unpublished essay, *op. cit.*, pp. 45–6.

any case, Hull was led to think that "he [Kurusu] was to lull us with talk until the moment Japan got ready to strike".⁷³⁾

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSLATORS' NOTES

Regarding the standard quality of translations, it is not easy to compare the American and British since, while the U.S. authorities have declassified a large amount of texts including Magic materials, far fewer decoded intercepts have been opened to the public by the British authorities up to the present. For reasons still unknown, the attitude of the British authorities towards the intercepts of pre-war Japanese messages is in sharp contrast with that towards the already largely declassified German messages known as "Enigma". Naturally, in the work of many historians, including that of Professor Sir Harry Hinsley and C.A. G. Simkins⁷⁴⁾, there is much analysis of the events surrounding the decoding of the German secret messages, but understandably little information about the Japanese messages.⁷⁵⁾

In the publication of Hinsley and Alan Stripp,⁷⁶⁾ there are four researchers, including Stripp himself, who have contributed to the material focusing on the activities of breaking Japanese codes during the period after Pearl Harbor but not in the pre-war period. It is worth noting, however, that the British interpreters were in general aware of the importance of making translator's notes in the reports for marking unclear and uncertain words.⁷⁷⁾ In the case of the war-time Japanese courses for

73) See C. Hull, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 1063.

74) Hinsley, F. H. and Simkins, C. A. G. *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1990.

75) In reply to an inquiry sent by the author, Professor Hinsley has written that "I know nothing about Japanese translations in the War". See Komatsu, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

76) Hinsley, F. H. and Stripp, Alan, eds. *Code Breakers; The Inside Story of Bletchley Park*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993.

intelligence services at the School of Oriental and African Studies (S.O. A.S.) in London, the teaching staff emphasised: "We believe ... that a student should understand exactly what is being said by every specimen of Japanese presented to him. Because of the subtlety of Japanese sentence forms, we favour the provision of very careful idiomatic English translations of early material".⁷⁸⁾ In contrast, there is to a surprising degree a dearth of translator's notes in the Magic version.

"RETRANSLATIONS" PRESENTED AT TOKYO TRIAL

In fact, soon after the end of the Pacific War, some American officials seem to have become aware of, but concealed, the problem of mistranslation. For instance, Ballantine, the representative of the State Department to the Trial, wrote: "I strongly suspected ... that the intercepted telegrams ... were poorly translated." But, as noted by Huddleston, "he says nothing about their failure to represent Japanese intentions ..."⁷⁹⁾ The issue of mistranslation first came to light at the Trial, and again in October of the same year, 1946, when parts of Magic were published by the Pearl Harbor Joint Committee of the United States Congress. The messages, which were then declassified and released for publication, were very limited both in quantity and quality. On one occasion, the Pearl Harbor Congressional Hearings were openly informed that the Magic translations submitted were only selected items taken from the complete file.⁸⁰⁾ Also, at the Trial, the Prosecution presented Japanese versions of telegrams which were not the same as the originals sent from the Tokyo Foreign Office, but which were re-translations back

77) Telephone conversation, Alan Stripp.

78) S.O.A.S. Japanese Language Courses, unpublished teaching material of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, p. 3.

79) Huddleston, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

80) *Ibid.*, p. 11.

into Japanese of the English Magic translations.⁸¹⁾

Huddleston found that some English versions of telegrams submitted at the Tokyo Trial were not Magic translations, but had been carefully translated by the Prosecution from the original Japanese telegrams without the Court being informed that these were the Prosecution’s own new translations.⁸²⁾ Furthermore, the U.S. Prosecution presented an English version of Telegram #800 at the Tokyo Trial, a version which was corrected by them including the last part containing “independently” from the Japanese original, and not the Magic version.

With regard to #800, Huddleston also observes that :

... there is a great difference between “Re item 2 of paragraph 3, it is desirable that the required quantity be decided upon by an agreement of both governments before the signatures are affixed to this present agreement”, as correctly translated by the Prosecution, and “Re item 2 of paragraph 3 [noting that the reader would have referred to the wrong telegram]. All the main items shall be considered and settled by the two governments before signatures are affixed to this agreement”, as incorrectly translated by MAGIC. In the original Japanese telegram the ‘required quantity’ refers to oil. In the MAGIC translation one might easily have assumed “all the main items” meant all the main items under discussion at the time. This telegram was circulated by MAGIC on November 20, 1941, which was the day that Ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu presented Proposal B to Secretary of State Hull. This could make it quite understandable why Secretary of State Hull did not regard Proposal B as a *modus vivendi*.⁸³⁾

81) Telegrams contemporarily numbered, by the Tokyo Foreign Office, 725, 726, 735, 736, 764 and 781. *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

82) Telegrams numbered 722 and 730, *ibid.*, p. 40.

83) *Ibid.*, p. 41.

As far as the author is aware, Telegram #800 is not included in "The 'Magic' Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4", published in 1978 by the U.S. authorities,⁸⁴⁾ although it was presented at the Tokyo Trial. The significant point is that the Prosecution did not inform the Court that this #800 and a few other telegrams were their own new translations and corrections. The fact that they felt the need to retranslate and correct a number of messages contrasts sharply with chief Navy decoder Alwin Kramer's testimony at the Congressional Hearings that he knew of only two translation errors in the entire file.⁸⁵⁾

THE "G-2" REPORT

On November 25th, for reasons which are still not clear, Secretary of War Stimson sent a mistaken report from Army Intelligence (known as G-2) to both Hull and Roosevelt informing that "Five Divisions have come down from Shantung and Shansi to Shanghai and there they had embarked on ships—30, 40, or 50 ships—and have been sighted south of Formosa",⁸⁶⁾ whereas the original report stated "A more or less normal movement of ten to thirty troopships in the Yangtse River below Shanghai".⁸⁷⁾

While Wohlstetter states :

Washington G-2's comment on the information had been that it represented a "normal" movement, i.e., nothing beyond what the Japanese had announced that they were going to do ... The reaction of these policymakers [Stimson, Hull, and President Roosevelt] was

84) Op. cit.

85) Huddleston, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

86) The Henry Lewis Stimson Diaries in the Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, New Haven, 1973, Reel Seven, Vol. 36, p. 49.

87) Rusbridger, James and Nave, Eric. *Betrayal at Pearl Harbor*, Michael O'Mara Books Ltd., London, 1991, p. 143.

sharply different from that of G-2, where the news became transformed into a “normal movement”. It is interesting to observe here that this decisive Japanese signal had taken five days ... to reach the chief policymaker.

Professor Shinji Sudo 須藤真志 concludes :

The Japanese transports were, as G-2 commented, nothing unusual but were [in reality] part of the “normal” movement ... It is hard to understand why Stimson exaggerated the G-2 news when he reported it to Roosevelt and Hull, although it was not an especially significant report...⁸⁸⁾

Wohlstetter states that “This actually was Admiral Ozawa’s expeditionary force against the Malay Peninsula”, but Jun Tsunoda 角田順 of the National Diet Library notes that “The truth is that the Army expeditionary force for Malay left Sanya 三亜 in Hainan Island on December 4th, and the Navy Task Force which left Hitokappu Bay on November 26th was transmitted the instruction that the Force would be prepared to abort the mission for Hawaii and go back to Japan if the diplomatic negotiations were successful”.⁸⁹⁾ Thus Japan’s military movements at this stage were not “a decisive Japanese signal” to open hostilities yet, but indicated merely preparation for that possibility. Similarly, on the 28th the U.S. fleet led by Vice-Admiral William Halsey left Pearl Harbor for Wake Island and Halsey “individually” issued his or-

88) See Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p. 243 and Sudo, Shinji 須藤真志. *Nichi-Bei Kaisen Gaiko no Kenkyu* 日米開戦外交の研究 (A Study of U.S.-Japan Diplomacies leading up to the Outbreak of War), Keio Tsushin 慶應通信, Tokyo, 1986, pp. 274-6.

89) See Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p. 243 and Tsunoda, Jun 角田順, in *Nihon Kokusai Seiji Gakkai* 日本国際政治学会 (The Japan Association of International Relations). *Taiheiyo Senso e no Michi—Dai 7-kan—Nichibei Kaisen* 太平洋戦争への道—第七卷—日米開戦 (The Road to the Pacific War—Vol.7—The Outbreak of the U.S.-Japan War), Asahi Shimbun-sha 朝日新聞社, Tokyo, 1963 (hereafter TSM, Vol. 7), p. 317.

der to shoot any unknown ships and planes if the fleet faced them. As stated by Huddleston, “There is no question but that Japan was preparing herself for any eventuality, as the United States was”.⁹⁰⁾

The next morning in Washington when Stimson called Roosevelt, the President had not yet received the report. He “fairly blew up—jumped up into the air”, and said “that that changed the whole situation because it was an evidence of bad faith on the part of the Japanese”.⁹¹⁾ Hull met Roosevelt and was given approval by the President to remove the *modus vivendi* of the new proposals.⁹²⁾ According to Stimson’s diary Hull told Stimson on the telephone “I have washed my hands of it, and it is now in the hands of you and [Secretary of the Navy Frank] Knox, the Army and Navy”⁹³⁾.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHURCHILL’S CABLE

As to the exact meaning of a cable sent by Churchill regarding the *modus vivendi*, a significant perception gap between the British and Americans was exposed. Hull attributed his decision to remove the *modus vivendi* mainly to the opposition from the British and Chinese authorities, stating that :

[After receiving a cable from Churchill] ... I came to the conclusion that we should cancel out the *modus vivendi*. Instead, we should present to the Japanese solely the ten–point proposal for a general settlement to which originally the *modus vivendi* would have been in the nature of an introduction ... Although the *modus vivendi* proposal contained only a little “chicken feed” ... The Chinese were violently opposed, the other interested governments either unfavorable or

90) Huddleston, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

91) Stimson Diaries, *op. cit.*, Reel Seven, Vol. 36, p. 50.

92) C. Hull, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, pp. 1081–2.

93) Stimson Diaries, *op. cit.*, Reel Seven, Vol. 36, p. 53.

lukewarm. Their cooperation would have been essential.⁹⁴⁾

On November 27th, British Ambassador Lord Halifax, according to a memorandum of Sumner Welles, protested to the U.S. that :

He [Halifax] was not quite clear in his own mind as to the reasons which prompted this sudden change in presenting the Japanese Government with a document other than the *modus vivendi* document ... he could not understand this in as much as he had communicated to Secretary Hull the full support of the British Government.⁹⁵⁾

While Welles replied that "the message sent by Mr. Churchill to the President yesterday could hardly be regarded as 'full support' but on the contrary, very grave questioning of the course then proposed", Ambassador Halifax emphasised that "this message had been intended merely to express the objections on the part of the Chinese Government". Thus, there seems to have been a serious misinterpretation between the British government and the American decision makers on the meaning of Churchill's message of the 26th.

In this connection, F. C. Jones points out that :

The British Government—and presumably the Chinese and the Netherlands Governments—did not know that it was the American intention to present—together with the *modus vivendi*—proposals for a comprehensive settlement ..., Churchill has indicated in his memoirs that, had the British Government known of this, their fears about China would have been removed.⁹⁶⁾

94) C. Hull, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 1081.

95) Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1941, Vol. IV (hereafter FRUS, 1941, Vol. 4), United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1956, pp. 666–7.

96) Jones, F. C. "The Tojo Cabinet and the Japanese Decision to go to War", in Toynbee, Arnold and Toynbee, Veronica M., eds. *The Royal Institute of International Affairs : 1939–1946*, Vol. 3, *The Initial Triumph of the Axis*, Oxford University Press, London, 1958, p. 686.

Concerning the position of the Chinese government, Jones observes that “Whether the knowledge of this American intention would have removed Chiang’s opposition, too, is a moot point”.⁹⁷⁾ This view has been echoed by some other observers. Professor Anthony Kubek, for instance, states that : “The question arises here as to whether the Chinese did reject this proposal. The Chinese Ambassador denied his Government was blocking the putting into effect of a temporary arrangement which might afford a cooling-off spell in the Far Eastern situation ... But it is hardly conceivable that he [Hull] presented the modus vivendi to the Generalissimo [Chiang Kai-shek] in a manner designed to gain his acceptance”.⁹⁸⁾

In fact, Lord Halifax emphasised on the 27th that “the Burma Road would in fact be kept open [as requested by Chiang Kai-shek] if the modus vivendi agreement with Japan could be consummated”.⁹⁹⁾ Thus, three major factors influenced the decision to remove the modus vivendi from the Hull Note : the negative effect of the misinterpretations by the Magic translators, the G-2 report mistakenly sent by Stimson, and the confusion over Churchill’s message.

Furthermore, Professor George Kennan has commented on Roosevelt’s foreign policy in general : “Had FDR been determined to avoid war with the Japanese if at all possible, he would have conducted American policy quite differently ... than he actually did”.¹⁰⁰⁾ Robert Dallek, however, has given a different view stating that : “This [Kennan’s] picture of Roosevelt’s options leaves out the domestic context in

97) Ibid.

98) Kubek, Anthony. *How the Far East was Lost—American Policy and the Creation of Communist China, 1941–1949*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1963, p. 22.

99) FRUS, 1941, Vol. 4, p. 667.

100) Quoted in Dallek, Robert. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1979, p. 531.

which he had to operate. The struggle against fascism in American minds was indelibly linked with China's fight against Japan. Though mindful of the advantage of concentrating American power against Berlin, Roosevelt also appreciated that opposition to Japan was an essential part of the moral imperative Americans saw for fighting". Thus, Dallek emphasises that "Roosevelt could not discriminate between Germany and Japan", even if he wished to do so, because of the American social atmosphere.¹⁰¹⁾ On the other hand, Paul Schroeder has stated that the link between Germany and Japan "was revived as an issue by the American diplomats because it was expected to be useful in selling the anticipated war with Japan to the American ... public which might find it hard to understand and accept".¹⁰²⁾ Thus, the question of "cause and effect" remains with regard to this issue.

It is significant that an observer who has examined the American decision to abandon the *modus vivendi* in close detail notes :

His [Hull's] decision was evidently precipitated by Roosevelt's reaction to a message from Churchill ... and by news from G-2 on Japanese troop movements. The Churchill message and the G-2 report intensified the general atmosphere of pessimism already provided by Magic and by accusations of "appeasement" in the public press.¹⁰³⁾

EFFECT OF THE REMOVAL OF THE MODUS VIVENDI

There is no doubt in retrospect that the presentation of the Hull Note without the *modus vivendi* triggered the outbreak of the War within weeks. What America's aim was in presenting the Hull Note to Japan at that time, i.e. peace or war, has been a very provocative issue from

101) Ibid.

102) Schroeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-1.

103) Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

1941 up to the present. For example, Professor Akira Iriye of Harvard University states: "Japanese officials in Washington and Tokyo took the Hull note as an indication of the wide cleavage between the two countries, and they were of course right. However, they were off the mark when they viewed the note as an ultimatum. It merely restated the position that the United States would stand with China, Britain, and the Dutch, and would invite Japan to join them in re-establishing order in the Asian-Pacific region".¹⁰⁴⁾ In fact, Hull himself states in his memoirs: "The proposal I handed Ambassadors Nomura and Kurusu on November 26 was an honest effort to keep our conversations going ... It was Tokyo that intended to attack if the negotiations failed—not Washington. We had no plans for an attack on Japan. Japan was prepared for war in the Pacific, we were not. We wanted peace".¹⁰⁵⁾ However, these statements are not wholly compatible with other statements of his recorded by Stimson.

In the context of the policies established just before and after the presentation of the Hull Note, including "how we should maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot"¹⁰⁶⁾ on the 25th, "to kick the whole thing over to tell them that he had no other proposition at all"¹⁰⁷⁾ on the 26th, and "broken the whole matter off"¹⁰⁸⁾ on the 27th, Hull was able to say later that it was Japan's intention to attack, not Washington's. In any case, it is questionable whether Washington "wanted peace" or not at this stage, because the U.S. authorities, through the intercepts, knew Japan's policy was that "It was Tokyo that intended to

104) Iriye, Akira. *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*, Longman Group UK Ltd., Harlow, 1987, p. 181.

105) C. Hull, Vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 1083-4.

106) Stimson Diaries, op. cit., Reel Seven, Vol. 36, pp. 48-9.

107) *Ibid.*, p. 50.

108) *Ibid.*, p. 53.

attack if the negotiations failed”, and it was known the negotiations would fail if the *modus vivendi* was removed. The author remains unconvinced, on the basis of the materials presented in this thesis, by Hull’s “honest effort” and his intention to “invite Japan to join them” in the Hull Note.

However, it does not mean that Hull’s attitude was belligerent, since his decision to remove the *modus vivendi* was made under heavy pressure. One should recognise here the significant role of the Magic intercepts, which contributed to this pressure and over-emphasised a negative image of Japan’s attitude towards the peace talks. Hull himself admitted that “These intercepts, bearing our code name ‘Magic’, played little part in our early negotiations, but were of great importance during the final phases.”¹⁰⁹⁾

Based on the analysis in this thesis the author wishes to emphasise that the expectation for peace at this stage was realistic if an agreement on the basis of the *modus vivendi* had been reached and the opening hostilities had consequently been delayed, as analysed more fully in the subsequent thesis ; this is in contrast with the view that the Hull Note, even without the *modus vivendi*, was still a genuine invitation to Japan to continue negotiations.

MESSAGE TO THE EMPEROR

On November 26th, Roosevelt’s plan to send a “President’s Message” to the Emperor and the Presidential Message to Congress was postponed at the War Council because Hull again opposed it.¹¹⁰⁾ In the afternoon, the Japanese ambassadors sent a telegram (#1180) to Tokyo,¹¹¹⁾ setting

109) C. Hull, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 998.

110) T. Kase, op. cit., p. 323.

111) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 185–6.

out their own proposals for an exchange between the President and the Emperor of conciliatory messages and the establishment of neutral nations including Dutch East Indies in order to forestall British and American military occupation in the region.

Thus, both sides were simultaneously considering¹¹²⁾ very similar plans to exchange conciliatory messages between the heads of the two nations to avert the war, or at least to delay it, but failed to notice this significant fact. While Tokyo could not know that Roosevelt was coincidentally considering a similar plan, Washington was closer to awareness of the fact, since #1180 had been decoded. The Magic version, however, again failed to perceive this, due to the serious mistranslations and distortions caused by the difficulty in distinguishing the difference between the Japanese homonyms “shison” 至尊 (Majesty) and “shison” 子孫 (descendants, posterity). This led to their interpreting “asking President Roosevelt to send a telegram to the Emperor” as “for the sake of posterity”.

Although Telegram #1180 was translated on the 28th,¹¹³⁾ after the presentation of the Hull Note to Japan on the 26th, it would not necessarily have been too late if Magic had been translated accurately because the Japanese side still continued to try to avert the war, even after the Liaison Council understood the Hull Note (Telegram #1189) to be an ultimatum.¹¹⁴⁾ For example, on November 30th, Togo sent a message to Nomura to try to request the Americans to reconsider the Hull Note (Telegram #857) following the Liaison Council’s decision of the

112) Ibid., p. 386.

113) The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor, Vol. 4, op. cit., Appendix, p. A-93.

114) Tanemura, Suketaka 種村佐孝, Daihon’ei Kimitsu Nisshi 大本營機密日誌 (Confidential Diary of the Army General Staff), Daiyamondo-sha ダイヤモンド社, Tokyo, 1952. p. 105.

29th.¹¹⁵⁾ Even after the formal decision to open hostilities at the Gozen Kaigi of December 1st, there was still room to reconsider the decision, up to moments before the first bombs were dropped.

In fact, on November 13th, the Japanese naval commanders even discussed details of methods and techniques of communications between the fleet and aircraft so as to be able to prevent implementing the attack plan, by calling the planes back to the aircraft carriers, in the event of a successful outcome of diplomatic negotiations. They recognised that radio communication facilities between the fleet and the dive bombers and torpedo bombers were advanced enough to be able to call them back at any time after taking off, but those of the fighter planes had some technical weak points. In addition, while each bomber was expected to have a radio operator on board together with a pilot, this was not the case with the fighter planes. Thus, it was thought that such communications could only be really effective as long as the fighter planes were flying together with the dive bombers and torpedo bombers.¹¹⁶⁾

Hull persuaded Roosevelt to postpone the plan to send the President’s Message to the Emperor, stating : “I also was not in favor of the message to the Emperor ... I knew that the Japanese themselves did not make use of such means as a direct Presidential message. Normally they did not shift from a bold front to one of pleading until the situation with them was desperate. They would therefore regard the message as our last recourse and a sign of weakness”¹¹⁷⁾ although “He [Hull] contin-

115) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 211.

116) Boei-cho Boei Kenkyu-sho Senshi-shitsu 防衛庁防衛研究所戦史室 (The Military History Department of the National Institute for Defence Studies of the Defence Agency). Hawaii Sakusen ハワイ作戦 (The Hawaii Action), Asakumo Shimbun-sha 朝雲新聞社, Tokyo, 1967, pp. 230-1.

117) C. Hull, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 1092.

ued to mourn the fate of the *modus vivendi*”¹¹⁸⁾ after he handed the Hull Note to the Japanese ambassadors. It is interesting to compare Hull’s perspective with that of Togo’s expressed in Telegram #844 : “the idea of an exchange of messages between the President and the Emperor was not appropriate since the Hull Note [without the *modus vivendi*] was not acceptable”.¹¹⁹⁾ Thus, Japan gave up the plan to exchange messages between the Heads because of the omission of the *modus vivendi*, not because the Japanese “did not make use of such means”. In addition, the broadcasting of the mistaken report of Tojo’s aggressive speech was perhaps caused by a miscommunication within the Japanese administration, according to Telegram #866. Whatever the truth, the damage to U.S.–Japan relations from this misinformation was naturally quite serious at this stage.¹²⁰⁾

On December 7th at 08.00 (18.00 on the 6th in Washington) the U. S. President requested the Secretary of State to send an uncoded message to the Emperor to Ambassador Grew in Japan in spite of Stimson’s opposition.¹²¹⁾ The Secretary of State delayed sending it, although Roosevelt requested that it should be sent quickly.¹²²⁾ At 09 : 40 (19 : 40 on the 6th) the U.S. Government announced to the media its intention

118) Wohlstetter, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

119) *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho* 1941, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, pp. 205–6.

120) Nomura sent a message (#1222) to Tokyo to complain that Tojo’s speech, saying that the Anglo–Americans’ “exploitation” of the Asians “must be purged with vengeance”, had caused strong reaction in the U.S. after it had been widely reported by the Japanese and the U.S. media (see *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho* 1941, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 211). Togo sent Telegram #866 in reply to Nomura’s telegram, stating that Tojo did not make such a speech on the 30th, although it was mistakenly reported (see *ibid.*, p. 221). Hull criticised Tojo’s speech at the meeting with Nomura and Kurusu on December 1st (see *ibid.*, pp. 222–3).

121) Shigenori Togo, *op. cit.*, pp. 409–10.

122) Y. Sanematsu, *op. cit.*, p. 243..

to send a President's Message to the Emperor. At 11 : 00 (21 : 00 on the 6th) Secretary of State Hull sent the President's Message to the Emperor to Ambassador Grew.¹²³⁾ Tokyo received the President's Message at 12 : 00 (22 : 00 on the 6th). Lieutenant Colonel Morio Tomura 戸村盛雄 of the Army General Staff ordered a delay in delivering the President's Message to Grew, although the Emperor and the Japanese government were waiting to receive it immediately. Lieutenant Colonel Tomura thought that the President's Message would only cause confusion because of information which indicated that war had already started : Japanese forces near Malaya had shot down an allied plane (probably British) a day earlier. At 14 : 00 (00 : 00 on the 7th) Foreign Minister Togo sent a very urgent Telegram, #905, to Ambassador Nomura requesting him to confirm whether the U.S. was actually sending the President's Message to Tokyo or not.¹²⁴⁾ It indicates that there would still have been some hope of a different outcome if the President's Message had arrived in time to enable Japan to abandon the attack on Pearl Harbor scheduled for 03 : 30 (13 : 30 on the 7th) the next day. At 03 : 00 (13 : 00) Foreign Minister Togo finally met the Emperor to inform him that a confidential letter had been received from President Roosevelt (only 25 minutes before the actual start of the Pearl Harbor attack). Thus, the arrival of the President's Message was too late.

CONCLUSION

The existing literature falls into two categories : general surveys and special studies. In the West, general surveys present Japanese expansion as an escalating aggression of which the attack on Pearl Harbor was the climax. Literature of a more specialist nature is obviously more

123) Ibid.

124) Nihon Gaiko Bunsho—Nichibei Kosho 1941, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 257.

valuable than general surveys. However, there still exist issues unconsidered either by Japanese or Western scholarship, which the thesis attempts to illuminate. This gap exists primarily because Japanese is a difficult language for Westerners and because Japanese observers have usually felt no need to refer to Japanese sources in English. It is also because each side, studying its own sources, has a natural tendency to perpetuate rather than eliminate misperceptions.

Magic has been a subject of study ever since the Tokyo Trial and most scholars have argued that the mistranslations made no difference to the final outcome. The argument of the thesis is the opposite, namely that mistranslation from Magic was, in fact, of decisive importance. Had the relationship between America and Japan been one of better understanding the mistakes arising from Magic would have been trivial and, if there had simply existed the normal level of mistrust expected between adversaries who were nevertheless able to conduct negotiations without any misconceptions, they might still have reached an accommodation. Instead the mistranslations were built onto a misunderstanding which had become increasingly entrenched over decades. Above all they reinforced a belief on the American side that the Japanese were deceitful, so that no attempted compromise would be worth pursuing. It is important to recognise the fact that Magic contributed to the outbreak of the War, rather than avoiding the issue of its importance. The rejection of historical inevitability proposed by Isaiah Berlin of the University of Oxford is strongly endorsed here.¹²⁵⁾

In a psychological sense, it is understandable that some observers have wished to believe that the Pacific War was bound to happen, since it is painful to face the question of whether the War was avoidable and

125) Berlin, Isaiah, *Historical Inevitability*, Oxford University Press, London, 1954.

therefore whether such a huge number of lives was wasted. The author in fact shares this unwillingness to consider this possibility. The sources studied in this thesis, however, do not support the theory that it was “bound to happen”.

Note : Gozen Kaigi, which is generally rendered as “Imperial Conference” but which means literally “conference in the presence of the Emperor”, i. e. the Emperor’s presence as symbolic head of state conferred legitimacy on the proceedings.

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