

Correspondence between Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, on June 23, 1941

Communication #1 (Harold Ickes to FDR)



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

June 23, 1941.

My dear Mr. President:

There will never be so good a time to stop the shipment of oil to Japan as we now have. Japan is so preoccupied with what is happening in Russia and what may happen in Siberia that she won't venture a hostile move against the Dutch East Indies.

To embargo oil to Japan would be as popular a move in all parts of the country as you could make. Recent expressions of sentiment have demonstrated how the people feel on this subject. There might develop from the embargoing of oil to Japan such a situation as would make it, not only possible but easy, to get into this war in an effective way. And if we should thus indirectly be brought in, we would avoid the criticism that we had gone in as an ally of communistic Russia.

Sincerely yours,

Secretary of the Interior.

The President,
The White House.

Communication #2 (FDR to Harold Ickes)

June 23, 1941.

Dear Harold:-

I have yours of June 23rd recommending the immediate stopping of shipments of oil to Japan. Please let me know if this would continue to be your judgment if this were to tip the delicate scales and cause Japan to decide either to attack Russia or to attack the Dutch East Indies.

Always sincerely,

The Honorable
The Secretary of the Interior,
Washington, D. C.

Communication #3 (Harold Ickes to FDR)



*file
Ickes m.*

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

June 23, 1941.

My dear Mr. President:

Russia, England and then the United States of America! Hitler continues to fall upon his victims at his own time. He has taken on one nation after another while the others have held back, believing that somehow they would escape the fate that he has told them he has in store for them. It may be difficult to get into this war the right way, but if we do not do it now, we will be, when our turn comes, without an ally anywhere in the world.

Psychologically, the war situation is now a difficult one. I hope that we won't permit the isolationists to get the jump on us and undertake to prove that aid to England is aid to Stalin and communism. Lindbergh and Wheeler will lose no time in renewing their campaign for isolation. And they will have a new and formidable weapon. As a matter of fact, Wheeler started in last night.

It seems to me that we have been caught unprepared in the domestic field while the international situation is far from clear. Public sentiment is terribly confused. Our enemies at home will busy themselves in an intensive effort to resolve this confusion in favor of inevitably destructive isolation.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Z. Ickes

Secretary of the Interior.

The President,
The White House.

Excerpt from the McCollum Memorandum

0p-16-F-2 ONI 7 October 1940

Memorandum for the Director

Subject: Estimate of the Situation in the Pacific and Recommendations for Action by the United States.

....

8. A consideration of the foregoing leads to the conclusion that prompt aggressive naval action against Japan by the United States would render Japan incapable of affording any help to Germany and Italy in their attack on England and that Japan itself would be faced with a situation in which her navy could be forced to fight on most unfavorable terms or accept fairly early collapse of the country through the force of blockade. A prompt and early declaration of war after entering into suitable arrangements with England and Holland, would be most effective in bringing about the early collapse of Japan and thus eliminating our enemy in the Pacific before Germany and Italy could strike at us effectively. Furthermore, elimination of Japan must surely strengthen Britain's position against Germany and Italy and, in addition, such action would increase the confidence and support of all nations who tend to be friendly towards us.

9. It is not believed that in the present state of political opinion the United States government is capable of declaring war against Japan without more ado; and it is barely possible that vigorous action on our part might lead the Japanese to modify their attitude. Therefore, the following course of action is suggested:

- A. Make an arrangement with Britain for the use of British bases in the Pacific, particularly Singapore.
- B. Make an arrangement with Holland for the use of base facilities and acquisition of supplies in the Dutch East Indies.
- C. Give all possible aid to the Chinese government of Chiang-Kai-Shek.
- D. Send a division of long range heavy cruisers to the Orient, Philippines, or Singapore.
- E. Send two divisions of submarines to the Orient.
- F. Keep the main strength of the U.S. fleet now in the Pacific in the vicinity of the Hawaiian Islands.
- G. Insist that the Dutch refuse to grant Japanese demands for undue economic concessions, particularly oil.
- H. Completely embargo all U.S. trade with Japan, in collaboration with a similar embargo imposed by the British Empire.

10. If by these means Japan could be led to commit an overt act of war, so much the better. At all events we must be fully prepared to accept the threat of war.

A. H. McCollum

CC-0p-16

0p-16-F

File

....

BACKGROUND:

The McCollum memo, also known as the *Eight Action Memo*, was a memorandum, dated October 7, 1940 (more than a year before the Pearl Harbor attack), sent by Lieutenant Commander Arthur H. McCollum, who "provided the president with intelligence reports on [Japan]... [and oversaw] every intercepted and decoded Japanese military and diplomatic report destined for the White House" in his capacity as director of the Office of Naval Intelligence's Far East Asia section. It was sent to Navy Captains Dudley Knox and Walter Stratton Anderson, who agreed with the actions described within the memo.

The memo outlined the general situation of several nations in World War II and recommended an eight-part course of action for the United States to take in regard to the Japanese Empire in the South Pacific, suggesting the United States provoke Japan into committing an "overt act of war". (Wiki)

Answer the questions below based on the primary source documents herein:

1. What were the attitudes of the authors towards the America First Committee (see p726 of TAV)?
2. What were the views of the authors about how best to enter WWII?
3. What are the authors' primary concerns regarding how the US is perceived if it enters WWII?
4. What reasons did the authors provide for wanting to enter WWII?