

Prelude

*In our interest it seems to be our duty to ask explanation from Japan and insist firmly upon our rights. Our commercial interests in Japan are greater than those in China, but the look ahead shows our interest to be a strong and independent China rather than one held in subjection Japan.*¹

The proceeding is an excerpt of a memorandum, entitled "The Crisis in China," from Edward T. Williams to the American Secretary of State in the early part of President Woodrow Wilson's administration, William Jennings Bryan. Williams, American *chargé d'affaires* in Peking, detailed the danger to China's integrity and American economic interests after the Japanese delivery of the infamous "21 Demands." His memorandum continued:

*what is revealed shows a serious crisis in Far Eastern affairs threatening not only China's peace but America's interests.*²

Japan had chosen the outbreak of the war in Europe to try to consolidate her political and economic position in Manchuria and to advance those same interests into China proper; this of, course, would conflict with the interests of the Western powers (Britain, Russia, France, Germany and the United States). Of those only the United States was not embroiled in the European war and thus was the only possible deterrent available to curb Japanese ambitions. Initially the major powers had sought to avoid expanding the theater of war to the Far East but fear of German naval activity against British interests in Asia triggered (under provisions of the 1911 Anglo-Japanese Alliance) the entry of Japan into the war on the side of the Allies.

Japan itself had not wanted to be dragged into a European war but after a British request for "limited" offensive action against German territory and forces in China, it recognized "the advantages of raising Japan's status through obliterating German bases from East Asia"³ and that making war on Germany would provide "gains which Japan could make in the Pacific and in China, especially in Manchuria."⁴

In the early weeks of the war the American government tried to get the belligerents to accept the neutralization of "foreign settlements" (specifically treaty ports) and thereby "protect the interests of the United

¹ Williams to Bryan, 27 January 1915, Arthur S. Link and Robert C. Hildebrand, eds., The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, 51 vols., (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1957-), 32:136-137. Hereafter cited as Wilson Papers.

² Wilson Papers, 32:135.

³ Ian Nish, Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869-1942 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 94.

⁴ Ibid., 95.

States in China"⁵ and China's integrity. It appeared certain that the war's spread to Asia would, in itself, disrupt normal commerce as well as make China suffer the brunt of any combat. The British were willing to maintain the status quo in China only and not throughout the Pacific. The position was due to the vast area that would be precluded from any offensive operations.⁶

Germany agreed to neutralization of the Far East if Britain agreed, and "proposed a mutual withdrawal of warships in Eastern waters" if both Britain and Japan agreed. Germany also informed Japan that it had no desire for war with the Japanese.⁷ As both Britain and Japan wanted no limits on their freedom of action neither accepted a wider area of neutralization. As additional justification, they argued that "Germany was engaged day and night in intensive war preparations" which endangered the peace in the Far East.⁸ Such work led eventually to a British request (7 August 1914) that Japan initiate offensive operations against "German armed merchant-men." The request recognized that such activity would constitute an act of war. Japan agreed to the British request but refused to limit its actions solely to "the hunting out and destruction of hostile merchant cruisers."⁹

On 13 August Britain agreed that Japan should enter the war on the assurance that Japan would limit the area of operations, but that the assurance would not be included in the Japanese declaration of war.¹⁰ The ongoing diplomatic exchanges did not escape the notice of other interested parties.

On 14 August Robert Lansing, then State Department Counselor, sent the following to Bryan, "Persistent reports and rumors are that Japan intends to declare war upon Germany."¹¹ Lansing understood the realities involved in the Japanese decision to go to war against the Germans. He wished to insure that the United States took a position that would not be ignored in the event of open conflict. Lansing proposed that the United States would do better by waiting until after hostilities broke out in Asia. Then the United States "with perfect propriety might

⁵ Lansing memorandum to Bryan, 7 August 1914, Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States: The Lansing Papers, 1914-1920, 2 vols., (Washington: G P O, 1939-1940), 1:2. Hereafter Lansing Papers.

⁶ Roy W. Curry, Woodrow Wilson and Far Eastern Policy, 1913-1921 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), 105.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kajima Morinosuke, The Diplomacy of Japan, 1894-1922, 3 vols., (Tokyo: The Kajima Institute of Peace, 1976), 3:30.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 30-31.

¹¹ Lansing to Bryan, 14 August 1914, Lansing Papers, 1:3-4.

approach all the belligerents upon the subject [of neutralization and status quo in China] simultaneously"¹² and thus make it difficult for Japan to ignore the overture. Lansing referred point five of the 1908 Root-Takahira note, which read:

*Should any event occur threatening the principle of equal opportunity it remains for the two Governments to arrive at an understanding.*¹³

As Lansing's proposal made its way up the State Department chain of command, Japan presented Germany with an ultimatum on 15 August 1914. Japan considered it "highly important and necessary to remove all causes of disturbance to the peace of the Far East."¹⁴ To insure that peace was not endangered, it would be necessary for Germany to (1) withdraw [or disarm] immediately from East Asian waters all German men-of-war and (2) to turn over to Japan, by no later than 15 September, the leasehold of "Kiaochou with a view to eventual restoration of the same to China."¹⁵ The same day Japan's Foreign Minister, Baron Kato Takeji, informed the American Ambassador to Japan, George Guthrie, that "Japan sought no territorial aggrandizement nor other selfish ends through war." Furthermore, Japan was determined not to infringe upon the interests of other powers.¹⁶ Kato assured a group of Japanese businessmen that Japan would "take no action as to give third Powers any cause or anxiety" over interests in Asia.¹⁷

Germany tried to find a way to get around the Japanese ultimatum provision relating to the leasehold. It first attempted to retrocede the leasehold to China with the eventual goal of recovery after the war. The Japanese warned China that it would not recognize such an action¹⁸ The Germans then sought to get the United States to accept the cession of Kiaochou. The American government refused to consummate such an action for "such a course would do more to provoke war than to avert war."¹⁹

In any case by 23 August the Japanese declared war against Germany and began offensive operations on 2

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Thomas F. Millard, Our Eastern Question (New York: The Century Co., 1916), 469-471.

¹⁴ Kajima, 3:54.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ MacMurray to Bryan, 20 August 1914, FRUS 1914 (Washington: G P O, 1914), Supplement, 173-174.

¹⁹ Ibid., 174.

September. China Attempted to limit combat to the immediate area around the leasehold at Kiaochou and Tsingtao (a very small portion of the Shantung Peninsula). It declared on 3 September (following the landing of Japanese troops outside the leaseholds boundaries) that a limited designated area was being recognized as an area where "it cannot hold itself responsible for the obligations of strict neutrality."²⁰ Both Germany and Japan refused to recognize such a zone. Germany responded that such a zone would assist any invading forces²¹ while Japan claimed that "military necessity" made it imperative that Japanese forces be able to attack Tsingtao and Kiaochou without encumbrance.²² Again claiming "military necessity" Japanese forces took control of German interests (mining concessions and rail lines) stretching between Tsingtao and Tsinan, a distance of over 240 miles.²³ By 6 November the German forces at Tsingtao had surrendered and Japan began to take over administrative functions previously carried out by Germans, appearing to set itself in for a long-term occupation. One observer's opinion of the events was that Japan had no intention of abandoning the hold she has gained in Shantung, "unless some kind of compulsion is put upon her to require it."²⁴ The American Ambassador in Tokyo (Guthrie) also felt that the Japanese were securing a prime position of influence and were most certainly not going to give up their gains without any compensation.²⁵

An early sign of Japanese intransigence came on 25 November when China, following the surrender of the German forces throughout the Shantung Peninsula, proposed to abolish the declared war zone. Japan's responded (30 November) that "our military authorities desire no change in the status of the war zone for the time being."²⁶ China broached the subject again on 2 December, inquiring about Japan's "temporary" requirements relative to the zone and received the same response invoking military necessity.²⁷ Japan took this time to determine the disposition of the German lease-hold and interests in Shantung Peninsula, notwithstanding that she had sent the 15 August

²⁰ Ibid., 188-189.

²¹ John V.A. MacMurray, ed., Treaties and Agreements With and Concerning China, 1894-1919 2 vols., (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), 2: 1367.

²² Millard, 107.

²³ Thomas F. LaFargue, China and the World War 1937 (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), 23-24.

²⁴ Millard, 116.

²⁵ Guthrie to Bryan, 23 November 1914, FRUS 1914, Supplement, 203-204.

²⁶ Kajima, 3:164-165.

²⁷ Ibid., 165-166.

ultimatum to Germany with a provision calling for "eventual restoration" to China. Following the 2 December query from China the Japanese Diet took up the following issues (8 December):

- (a) Whether Kiaochoou will be returned to China?
- (b) Whether Japan were pledged to China, or to any Power, in the matter of Kiaochoou?
- (c) Whether the clause in the ultimatum [of 15 August] referring to Kiaochoou to China did not bind the action of Japan?²⁸

The response from the Foreign Minister Kato was that:

- (a) *the question regarding Kiaochoou was, at present, unanswerable.*
- (b) *Japan had never committed herself to any foreign Power on this point.*
- (c) *The purpose of the ultimatum was to take Kiaochoou from Germany and restore peace in the Orient. Restitution was not thought of and was not referred in the ultimatum.*²⁹

The Diet mulled over the questions for two days, but the end result was that Japan "reneged" on its stated goal of retrocession of the leasehold to China, and that all questions "would be left to future negotiations."³⁰ Kato "while reiterating the adherence of Japan to the preservation of the territorial integrity of China, expressed the desire to strengthen her foothold in Manchuria and Mongolia."³¹

The United States position from 2 September on (*vis-à-vis* the landing of Japanese troops and the problem of Shantung) was to provide moral support but "that it would be quixotic in the extreme to allow the question of China's territorial integrity" to entangle the United States in difficulties.³² The decision not to intervene was based on the fact that the United States was then more concerned with events in Europe. Such a position was justified with the following interpretation of the Root-Takahira notes; that the exchange of notes applied to the case of internal disorders in China. That was not the existing situation.³³ The United States clearly avoided any entanglement in China and would do so until it considered its interests threatened. One Asian observer noted:

*It became clear that the American government was reluctant to run into any trouble with Japan by interfering in Shantung. Its main concern now seemed to be China's internal stability.*³⁴

The United States saw very little danger in what Japan was doing in China and thus did very little. It took a bold

²⁸ Millard, 121.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Guthrie to Bryan, 12 December 1914, FRUS 1914, Supplement, 206-207.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., Lansing to Reinsch, 4 November 1914.

³³ Ibid., MacMurray to Bryan, 10 September 1914.

³⁴ Li Tien-yi, Woodrow Wilson's China Policy, 1913-1917 1952 (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 99.

move on the part of the Japanese to change the perception regarding American interests.

The Japanese Move to Dominate China

One catalyst driving Japan's ambition came from China itself. With the defeat of the German forces in Shantung the Chinese government saw no reason to maintain the fiction of a war zone. Against Japan's previously stated wishes the Chinese canceled the war zone, notifying Japan on 7 January 1915. The Japanese government refused to recognize China's action, characterizing the cancellation as "improper, arbitrary, betraying, in fact, want of confidence in international good faith and regardless of friendly relations."³⁵ Here was a case of naked ambition for it seemed absurd for Japan to accuse China of betraying their friendly relations. In fact Japan had been looking for an excuse to extend its control to larger areas of China. The period of strained relations between the two nations then reached a critical point. Japan felt free to step in and take advantage fully aware that the major powers were too deeply involved in the European war. The United States had so far provided no obstacle to Japanese moves. Japan was finally able to put into action a plot that had been in the planning stages since at least as early as January, 1913.³⁶ The goal of forthcoming demands upon China was to:

*secure recognition of her paramount interests [and] was an expression of a policy of continental expansion which Japan had not fully realized owing to the international balance of power in China.*³⁷

That favorable opportunity was to come at the expense of the other powers, unable to provide any resistance. Only the United States free was to act. As indicated above the Japanese saw no problems with the United States.

The Japanese picked the psychological moment" of China's note rescinding the war zone to deliver what they considered a fatal blow. On 18 January the Japanese Minister to China, Hioki Eki, handed the President of China, Yuan Shih-k'ai, a note outlining what would be known as the Twenty-one Demands (broken into five groups):

Group I-required China to assent in advance to any agreement Japan made with Germany over the disposition of the Shantung Peninsula.

Group II-required China to agree to Japan's almost complete domination in Kwantung, South Manchuria and Inner Mongolia.

Group III-dealt with a joint venture concerning a mining company.

³⁵ MacMurray, 2:1175.

³⁶ Li, 101.

³⁷ Ibid. A major source of disappointment is the lack of any documentation in Kajima's The Diplomacy of Japan related to the formulation of the Twenty-one Demands and their delivery to the Chinese.

Group IV-dealt with the issue of territorial integrity and required China to agree not to alienate any territory along the coast. Specifically Fukien Province.

Group V-required China to become a virtual protectorate by employing Japanese as advisors, allow Japanese to own land in the interior, use Japanese in police offices, to buy a percentage of arms from Japan and to engage Japanese technical experts to build an arsenal. Additionally, China was to assign Japan extensive railway concessions.³⁸

Hioki warned Yuan to maintain secrecy on the pain of grave circumstances to China. Hioki went on to state the Japanese were indignant with China because it had adopted a policy hostile to Japan. Instead of depending upon its fellow Asian neighbor, it sought, instead, to befriend Western powers, significantly the United States.³⁹

Hioki's tone was clear to Yuan, understandably aghast. Certainly China had adopted a hostile attitude toward Japan, because Yuan understood that the Japanese meant to consume China. Yuan understood further that Japan sought to do so out of the limelight. Hioki ended the meeting with a final warning that if no action were forthcoming Japan would find it impossible to "restrain" Japanese nationals from instigating revolutionary trouble in China.⁴⁰

Although enjoined not to do so, Yuan decided that the only way to fight the Japanese "overtures" was to notify the United States about the demands. "From the Chinese point of view, publicity was the most effective means to counter Japanese secret diplomacy."⁴¹ A few days after Hioki's visit, a Chinese minister divulged to the American representative to Peking, Paul Reinsch, that Japan had presented a note of an "astonishing nature" and "categorical demands" which if accepted would reduce China to a state of vassalage.⁴² Reinsch, sympathetic to China's position and wary of Japan, saw this as a danger to China's independence. Reinsch cabled the State Department (23 January 1915) with the news that:

[Japan] submitted a list of demands at the same time pledging the [Chinese] not to divulge the demands on pain of serious consequence. The demands could not be granted without abandoning the open-door policy.⁴³

On 24 January Reinsch sent the following amplification, "The independence of China and equal opportunity of western nations are at stake."⁴⁴ Additionally, Reinsch sent a longer telegram to the State Department discussing the

³⁸ Ibid., 103-104.

³⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Reinsch to Bryan, 23 January 1915, FRUS 1915, 79.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 24 January 1915, 80.

facts as he then understood them:

*The legation is informed in confidence the Japanese demands include predominant special interests in impairment of China's sovereignty and of Open Door in Shantung. [T]his would work the exclusion of American participation in economic and industrial development of China.*⁴⁵

Reinsch closed the telegram with a request for the State Department to seek the help of Great Britain in the endeavor to talk to her Ally "with a view to abating such of them [the demands] as may prove inconsistent with Anglo-Japanese alliance."⁴⁶

Reinsch's views were forwarded to President Woodrow Wilson who responded that "this memorandum is a bit discouraging. But I believe all these things can be cleared up."⁴⁷ Wilson sent a second letter the same day to Bryan in which he questioned what the United States could do to secure Japanese interests in China while at the same time ensuring American interests in China.⁴⁸

Throughout the period American interests lay more in preserving the Open Door and ensuring equal opportunity. Such a position held out very little regard for China's territorial integrity, unless it actually impacted upon American interests. The only response to Reinsch from the State Department was "the matter is having careful and prompt attention. Keep the Department fully informed."⁴⁹

In the interim, the Chinese government leaked to the Peking press a hint about the demands. The press then began printing speculations about the demands. Reinsch cabled Bryan on 29 January with the news that the demands included a call for the recognition of Japan's exclusive sphere of influence in Fukien.⁵⁰

Japan's response to the leaks was to announce that "the demands [are] overtures which violate no treaty and contemplate no infringement"⁵¹ of China. The announcement failed, thought, to answer the "question[s] of administrative integrity."⁵² On 1 February Reinsch cabled State with the following suggestions; (1) give moral and political support to China in order to make public all of the Japanese demands and (2) to enlist the help of Britain in

⁴⁵ Reinsch to ----, 26 January 1915, Wilson Papers, 32:137-138.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Wilson to Bryan, 27 January 1915, 139.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Bryan to Reinsch, 28 January 1915, FRUS 1915, 80.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Reinsch to Bryan, 29 January 1915, 81.

⁵¹ Ibid., Reinsch to Bryan, 1 February 1915, 81-82.

⁵² Ibid.

"opposing Japanese supremacy in China."⁵³

Recognizing that time might not be on its side, on 2 February the Japanese began negotiations with China on the list of demands. The Japanese hoped to conclude an agreement before any intervention from a third party. On the same day Edward T. Williams suggested to Bryan that China should publish the demands "so that the whole world might pronounce judgment on them and no violation of American rights might occur."⁵⁴

Williams' suggestions were rejected by both Bryan and Wilson since neither was willing to "assume the responsibility of insisting upon official disclosure by China."⁵⁵ Following additional leaks to the Chinese press "Japanese designs upon China quickly became a topic of discussion all over the world."⁵⁶ This forced the Japanese to operate in the light of unfavorable publicity. On 3 February, and again on 6 February, the Japanese reported to the American Embassy in Tokyo that "these demands involve no infringement of China's territorial integrity and no impairment of foreign rights in that country" and "Japan's interest in China was [solely] to preserve peace and the policy of the open door and equal opportunity"⁵⁷ and that Japan had no other motives.

The Chinese plan to go public with the secret "demands" worked well enough, forcing the Japanese government to deliver to Bryan in Washington on 8 February an amended copy of the list of demands, with the delivery of the same list to the Guthrie in Tokyo.⁵⁸ The Japanese government attempted to cover up the extent of their demands by failing to include Group V in the delivered copies.⁵⁹ The Chinese again reaped a golden opportunity when its representatives in Washington and Peking delivered to Bryan and Reinsch the complete text of the demands. Bryan quickly understood the implications of Group V and cabled Reinsch to ascertain whether the Chinese had objected so strongly to the group that the Japanese had dropped them from the negotiations.⁶⁰ At the same time, Bryan astutely asked Guthrie to thank the Japanese for their list. Guthrie was to show the Japanese a

⁵³ Reinsch to Bryan, 1 February 1915, Wilson Papers, 32:169-171.

⁵⁴ Li, 109.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁷ Guthrie to Bryan, 3 February 1915, 6 February 1915, FRUS 1915, 82-83.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Guthrie to Bryan, 9 February 1915, 84-85.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Japanese Embassy to State Department, n.d, received 8 February 1915, 83-84.

⁶⁰ Ibid., Bryan to Reinsch, 19 February 1915, 95; Li, 110-111.

copy of the Chinese list of demands and use it as an opportunity to find out from the Japanese themselves about the fifth group.⁶¹ Bryan suspected that the Japanese were trying to prevent any third party intervention by admitting to some of the demands to the United States. Bryan knew that the Japanese were rushing the negotiations with the Chinese so that an agreement could be presented as a *fait accompli*.

Those suspicions were proven when on 20 February Reinsch cabled Bryan to inform him that the Japanese were unhappy with the pace of the negotiations "but insisted upon the whole set of twenty-one demands including the more obnoxious ones in article V [Group V]."⁶² Reinsch now appealed directly to Wilson to consider the dangers to American interests and to China's independence. Wilson responded that "intervention on her behalf would really do more harm than good." Wilson sought not to provoke the Japanese but implied he would be "ready to step in at any point where it is wise to do so."⁶³ Though not what Reinsch sought—strong support of China—he was gratified to see the president more closely attuned to the situation.

Bryan's ruse got results on 21 February when Guthrie wired that Japan was insisting on China's acceptance of the demands (as presented) and that along with the demands:

*several matters have [now] been presented as "requests" or wishes [of] which consideration was desired. [The Japanese] anxious that you should understand that other items are "requests" and were so designated when presented.*⁶⁴

The Chinese did not concur with the Japanese interpretation of the fifth group. Hioki had presented the "demands" to Yuan without any notice that the last group was a Japanese "wish." Yuan was under the impression that all were demands and so communicated them as such to the United States (and leaked them as such to the newspapers). Hioki's instructions for delivering the demands were that the last group was different from the other four and thus represented "wishes."⁶⁵

Bryan immediately presented Wilson with those alleged facts. Bryan objected to several of the items in the "requests" requiring China to use Japanese advisors in police offices. China was also required to buy a fixed

⁶¹ Ibid., Bryan to Guthrie, 19 February 1915, 93; Bryan to Guthrie, 18 February 1915, Wilson Papers, 32:247-248.

⁶² Ibid., Reinsch to Bryan, 20 February 1915, 95-96.

⁶³ Li, 111-112.

⁶⁴ Guthrie to Bryan, 21 February 1915, FRUS 1915, 81.

⁶⁵ MacMurray, 2:1234; Li, 104.

percentage of munitions from Japan. Finally, Bryan objected to the Japanese desire for an exclusive sphere in Fukien. Bryan's objections were based on, (a) a threat to China's integrity and (b) a threat to equal treatment [the open door].⁶⁶ Bryan recommended that the American government should "express gratifications that these are not demands but merely presented as requests" and that the American view of such "requests" should not, in itself, be considered objectionable.⁶⁷

Wilson responded on 4 March that he also opposed the "requests" and authorized Bryan to "go straight at the matter" as soon as possible.⁶⁸ The Wilson letter contained two enclosures, one from Edward T. Williams and the second from Robert Lansing, in which both proposed (and Wilson rejected) that the United States obtain a quid pro quo in exchange for allowing Japan to proceed with the "demands." Both subordinates recognized that the "internal pressure" of an increasing population gave Japan a vested interest in China. They argued that it would be to America's advantage to allow Japan to proceed with its plan while getting them to (1) make no further complaints regarding discriminatory immigration legislation, (2) reaffirm explicitly the principle of the "Open Door" and, (3) agree to prevent the monopolization of trade and railways in China by Japanese subjects.⁶⁹ The two knew that the United States could not object to both the "demands" in Manchuria and the "requests" without offending the Japanese.

Lansing's argued that the United State should recognize the special interests that Japan had in China while ensuring that American interests were not threatened by Japan. Wilson and Bryan decided not to link the issue of immigration legislation to the "demands." Neither Wilson nor Bryan felt that it was necessary to strike a deal with Japan. Wilson authorized Bryan to transmit American objections to Japan.⁷⁰

The urgency of the negotiations between China and Japan reached a critical point on 8 March when Japan notified China that it:

*was dissatisfied with the progress and that unless concessions have been granted, means outside of diplomacy might be resorted to.*⁷¹

⁶⁶ Li, 112-113; Bryan to Wilson, 22 February 1915, Wilson Papers, 32: 269-270.

⁶⁷ Bryan to Wilson, 22 February 1915, Wilson Papers, 32:270-271.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Wilson to Bryan, 4 March 1915, 319.

⁶⁹ Ibid., enclosures I and II to letter, Wilson to Bryan, 4 March 1915, 319-323; Lansing to Bryan, 1 March 1915, Lansing Papers, 2:407-408.

⁷⁰ Li, 114.

⁷¹ Reinsch to Bryan, 8 March 1915, FRUS 1915, 101.

The phrase "outside of diplomacy" could only imply one thing—the use of force. The Chinese were willing to assent to almost all the demands but were adamant on Group V. The Japanese negotiator threatened force and gave the Chinese government four days to respond. On 10 March Wilson directed Bryan to deliver the American response to Japan before "the day named in the dispatches on which China must yield or ---?"⁷²

The "or ---?" indicated that Wilson was unsure of Japanese intentions and that it would be necessary to again interject American views. On 13 March Bryan delivered a note to the Japanese Ambassador which supported Groups I, II, and III, presented some objection to Group IV (regarding Fukien) and objected to four of seven provisions of Group V (employment of Japanese advisors and purchase of Japanese made munitions).⁷³

The Japanese were at first sure that China had persuaded the United States to intervene in the negotiations but were assured by Bryan that "our note was not presented at the request or suggestion of China or any other power."⁷⁴ Kato met with Guthrie, discussing with him the American note and the question of Fukien.

Guthrie reported that the Japanese were sensitive to Fukien because of its proximity to Formosa. They were disturbed as well by the fear that the U.S. Navy might acquire a naval station in the province. Kato cited Secretary of State John Hay's 1900 suggestion that the United States develop a harbor in the province for a coaling station. Nothing came of that incident, but more recently the Bethlehem Steel Company had been negotiating with the Chinese government for such a base. The Japanese sought to prevent "any power [securing] a foothold [t]here." The Japanese argued that they did not desire to exclude others economically from the province and would be willing to reconsider Group IV if the United States would agree not participate in any development in the province. Kato also pointed out the distinction between the "demands" and "request" and that Japan would not seek the latter by force.⁷⁵

Kato's statements regarding the use of force were proven a subterfuge. Reinsch reported the transfer and

⁷² Wilson to Bryan, 10 March 1915, Lansing Papers, 2:409.

⁷³ Bryan to Japanese Ambassador, 13 March 1915, Lansing Papers, 409.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Guthrie to Bryan, 17 March 1915, 112, and Bryan to Guthrie, 17 March 1915, 113.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Guthrie to Bryan, 21 March 1915, 113-115. The fears Kato expressed regarding the development of a harbor in Fukien by Bethlehem Steel were somewhat justified. William R. Braisted documented many of the transactions between Bethlehem Steel and the Chinese in "China, the United States Navy, and the Bethlehem Steel Company, 1909-1929," Business Historical Review 42 (May 1968):50-66, and in The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909-1922, 2:77-93.

arrival of additional troops in Manchuria, a subtle signal to China to complete the negotiations.⁷⁶ None-the-less Bryan was agreeable to Kato's suggestion regarding Fukien and notified Wilson that the Kato proposal "suggested a way out so far as Fukien is concerned" and that he believed that an "exchange of notes would relieve the anxiety of the Japanese."⁷⁷ Bryan implied that the American objections to provisions of Group V were answered to his satisfaction when the Japanese stated that they were only after fair treatment in China *vis-à-vis* advisor and munitions purchases.⁷⁸ Wilson interpreted the Japanese answers differently, stating:

*I do not think the explanations are convincing. I quite understand the motives. Whatever the intention, they do constitute a limitation upon China's independence of action.*⁷⁹

Wilson did agree with Bryan that the Fukien problem was easily solved. They both agreed that an agreement could and should be made that would protect economic interests but that would "prevent all powers, not the United States alone, from securing concessions on the coast of Fukien."⁸⁰ On 26 March Bryan cabled Guthrie and authorized American approval for any agreement Japan might conclude with China that would prevent any power from developing a naval base in Fukien.⁸¹ On the same day Bryan sent a second cable to Guthrie to determine what was the status of the rest of the provisions in Group V that Bryan had earlier objected to.

Bryan authorized Guthrie to provide the following positions; the United States would agree to the employment of Japanese advisors and to the purchase of munitions from Japan if such an understanding between China and Japan did not lead to discriminatory action against the United States. Additionally, the United States would have no major objection to the employment of Japanese advisors if they were explicitly limited to Manchuria and Mongolia.⁸² Wilson and Bryan were quite willing to allow Japan to exercise its influence in areas where the United States had very little interests. The Japanese took the suggestions and shortly thereafter communicated to Bryan that it was withdrawing and reserving for further action the "requests" regarding arms and advisors.⁸³

⁷⁶ Ibid., Guthrie to Bryan, 11 March 1915, 104, Reinsch to Bryan, 13 March 1915, Reinsch to Bryan, 13 March 1915.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Bryan to Wilson, 22 March 1915, 409-411.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., Wilson to Bryan, 24 March 1915, 41.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Bryan to Guthrie, 26 March 1915, FRUS 1915, 116-117.

⁸² Bryan to Guthrie, 26 March 1915, Lansing Papers, 2:414.

⁸³ Li, 120.

In Peking Reinsch suspected that the Japanese were trying to convince the Chinese to accept all the demands by telling the Chinese that the United States had agreed to such demands. Reinsch reported on 31 March the Japanese had adopted an uncompromising attitude and reporting that "as the Chinese are now aware of the demands further discussion is unnecessary" and China was expected to make categorical answer or be prepared for the consequences.⁸⁴

Clearly what Japan was doing was an attempt to complete the negotiations in Peking before China realized the extent of American objections. On 5 April Reinsch reported that according to the information he was receiving from the Chinese, Japan had not yet told China that the requests were different from the demands. On 7 April Reinsch reported that the Japanese were still insisting on Chinese acceptance of the provisions of Group V that had been deleted.⁸⁵ By 14 April Wilson felt compelled to write to Bryan regarding the seriousness of the dispatches received from Reinsch:

*I wish that you might find an opportunity to express to the Japanese the concern we feel at hearing that his government is insisting upon the acquiescence of the Chinese. Has Reinsch has told it is not true we have acquiesced?*⁸⁶

Wilson's query about Reinsch is indeed telling because the American representative in Peking had not been completely informed of all the stages of negotiations between the American and Japanese governments. Reinsch had to use what limited information was available, and much of what he managed to uncover was misinformation from the Japanese. Notwithstanding Wilson's "grave concern," there was no implication that the United States would use force to ensure Japanese respect of the Open Door. Wilson did specifically authorized Reinsch on 15 April to notify the Chinese that the United States had not agreed to action that would threaten its rights in China and the welfare of China. Reinsch was to notify the Chinese government, as well, that the American government was still in negotiations with the Japanese.⁸⁷

After Reinsch notified the Chinese they stiffened their bargaining position and resisted Japanese pressure until they submitted a revised list of demands. Group V was deleted from that list but the Japanese insisted that the Chinese agree to discuss the group separately. Separate provisions were proposed for implementation of the articles regarding the use of advisors, the purchase of munitions and the question of Fukien. Reinsch noted "the so-called

⁸⁴ Reinsch to Bryan, 31 March 1915, [FRUS 1915](#), 118.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Reinsch to Bryan, 31 March 1915, 118, Reinsch to Bryan, 7 April 1915, 124.

⁸⁶ Wilson to Bryan, 14 April 1915, [Lansing Papers](#), 2:416-417.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Bryan to Reinsch, 15 April 1915, 2:417.

withdrawal of Group V is therefore a mere form, leaving the substance of the demands unaffected."⁸⁸ Most notably, the Japanese required the full and prompt acceptance of the revised list.⁸⁹

On 27 April Wilson realized that the Japanese were using America's private diplomacy to bludgeon China. To correct such an impression:

*it may become necessary to make our views public, perhaps in conjunction with other nations whose interests are involved.*⁹⁰

Wilson's judgment was supported by Li—"The privacy of the American representations to Japan accounted for the real weakness of the American influence."⁹¹

On 28 April China had apparently agreed to some of the demands but refused to accede to questions of Mongolia. At this point the Japanese threatened the use of force again. On 1 May China responded to the revised list of 26 April and, with the exception of one article pertaining to Mongolia and Group V, accepted all the Japanese demands. The Japanese found the answer to be "unsatisfactory" and drafted an ultimatum.⁹²

Reinsch notified on 4 May of a possible rupture⁹³ and on 6 May hastened to prevent an open conflict by appealing to both China and Japan to continue negotiations, informing France, Britain and Russia about the moves with the hope that they would assist the United States to prevent open war.⁹⁴ Unfortunately, Reinsch's plea was received in Tokyo on 7 May after two major events. First, the Japanese had already delivered an ultimatum to China in which she threatened the use of force if China did not accede to the demands (with the exception of Group V) by 9 May.⁹⁵ Second, the Lusitania had been sunk on the same day and the attention of the United States was now focused on a theater thousands of miles away. The delivery of the appeal was met with a "thank-you" for the concern and notification that the ultimatum had been accepted by China and that all of Japan's demands had been

⁸⁸ Reinsch to Bryan, 27 April 1915, FRUS 1915, 127.

⁸⁹ Li, 123.

⁹⁰ Wilson to Bryan, 27 April 1915, Lansing Papers, 2:417-418.

⁹¹ Li, 122.

⁹² Wheeler to Bryan, 28 April 1915, FRUS 1915, 127-128, Reinsch to Bryan, 3 May 1915, 130-131, Japanese Foreign Office to Japanese Ambassador, 6 May 1915, 141-143; Li, 123.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, Reinsch to Bryan, 4 May 1915, 131-132.

⁹⁴ Li, 123.

⁹⁵ Reinsch to Bryan, 6 May 1915, FRUS 1915, 144, 9 May 1915, 145.

met.⁹⁶

Japan had gained victory and the United States failed to prevent it, acting too late, failing to utilize all of its diplomatic and public pressure. The one thing left for the United States to do was to try to contain the damage and preserve its interests in China as well as provide additional moral support for China. On 11 May sent identical notes to Guthrie and Reinsch for delivery to the respective Foreign Ministers. The United States reserved the right to not recognize any action contemplated by the Japanese negotiations which would impinge upon American interests in China.⁹⁷

What did the United States gain from all of its actions. Failure to resort to other than diplomatic means to impress upon Japan our desire for the integrity of China and protection of our interests meant that the United States would not realize much. The early failure to assist China in its search for true neutrality and our unwilling-ness to offend the Japanese contributed to the climate of "appeasement." Additionally the "blindness" approach to the open door concept failed to advance the interests of China. Wilson's late moves only made the situation worse because it forced the Japanese to increase the pressure upon China to complete the negotiations.

Another factor was the failure to ensure that Reinsch properly advised the Chinese (to counter the Japanese ploys) as to our role in the negotiations with Japan regarding the demands. The Lansing suggestion to gain a quid pro quo was one that should have been seriously considered as Lansing correctly understood the realities of Japanese desires in the East and saw no reason to antagonize but rather an opportunity to make an accommodation with them. The 11 May note from only served to make the Japanese more hostile and in the end the United States position *vis-à-vis* East Asia appeared to be weaker. After the Japanese and Chinese signed on 25 May two treaties dealing with the demands all that was left for the United States to do was complain, so that in 1917 the Japanese gained American recognition of disputable "special interests." In the end China was not better off because of the American effort, which was an exercise in futility.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Bryan to Guthrie, 11 May 1915, 146.