

Sato Naotake: The way of a diplomat

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The article covers the biography of Sato Naotake, a prominent Japanese diplomat and statesman. He is mostly known in Russia as the last ambassador of militarist Japan in the Soviet Union. However, his career was much more comprehensive and noteworthy. Sato Naotake had become witness to the most dramatic period in the history of Japan, being a participant in many world events that had an effect on shaping Japan's development up to 1945.

Keywords: Sato Naotake, diplomacy, Japan, Russia, USSR, League of Nations, Second World War.

The fate of Sato Naotake was inextricably linked to Russia and the Soviet Union. Naotake started his career as a young attaché in St. Petersburg, and completed his diplomatic mission as the ambassador to Moscow by receiving the Soviet declaration of war. Russia mostly knows Sato as the last ambassador of militarist Japan to the Soviet Union, but his diplomatic and political activity was way broader and much more multifaceted, and we would like to speak about it in this article.

Childhood and youth: from Tanaka to Sato

The history of the family to which Tanaka (Sato) was born in 1882 goes back to the Tsugaru samurai clan from the Aomori prefecture. According to the family chronicle, during the Tensho period (1573–1586) the clan's progenitor, Tarogoro Tanaka, gave his life to save his master, Tsugaru Tamenobu. The master showed his gratitude by awarding the "Souemon" (guard of the right gate) title to Tanaka, and his family remained Tsugaru's vassals one generation after another until the Meiji Restoration.

Naotake's father, Konroku Tanaka, received samurai and Western education (Rangaku), and learned Russian from an Orthodox priest, Father Nikolai, in Hakodate (presumably, it was Nikolai Kasatkin). Konroku Tanaka also wanted to study in Russia, but the Boshin Civil War changed his plans. After the war, Tanaka Sr. joined the police, and held high-ranking positions in various prefectures.

In 1903, Naotake Tanaka was adopted by the family of Yoshimaro Sato, an old friend of the Tanaka family. There was no male heir in the Sato family, and Naotake Tanaka changed his name on the orders from his biological father, and married Yoshimaro Sato's daughter, Fumi, in January 1906.

Yoshimaro Sato was working for the Foreign Ministry his entire life, and held high-ranking positions, including the one of Ambassador to the United States. It was he who advised Naotake to take the diplomatic service exam.

The young man was not very enthusiastic about working for the ministry: in fact, he wanted to be a businessman, and was admitted to the Tokyo Higher School of Commerce (currently Hitotsubashi University). Nevertheless, he listened to the father's opinion, and passed the diplomatic and consular service exam. It was a process of strict selection: the tests were difficult, and only a few vacancies were available; the Foreign Ministry annually hired up to 7 new employees before WWI. Sato was hired by the Foreign Ministry almost simultaneously with Yosuke Matsuoka, Koki Hirota, and Shigeru Yoshida.

First tour: from St. Petersburg to Harbin, getting to know Russia

The newly established Japanese mission to Russia was the first assignment of the young diplomat. Sato arrived in St. Petersburg in March 1906, and spent eight and a half years in that city. Sato was an assistant to the Charge D'Affaires Ad Interim and, later on, Japanese Ambassador to Russia, Ichiro Motono.

Judging by memoirs of his compatriots, Sato was a favorite pupil of Motono, and accompanied him everywhere [Hasegawa 2005, p. 25]. Personal traits and education of Motono, an apt and cosmopolitan diplomat with good manners, who was trained in France and married a French woman, enabled his successful integration into the life of Russia's high society and successful establishment of diplomatic contacts. Sato recalled his work with Motono as precious professional and human experience.

While in St. Petersburg, Sato took private lessons of Russian and French, the second language of the country spoken by the then high society; and had a fluent knowledge of both. His later life was linked to Russia and France, and he acquired a reputation of Francophile.

Sato was promoted to the rank of the Embassy's second secretary in Russia before he was assigned to a consular position in Harbin in September 1914. He became the Consul General in June 1917. The Japanese population of Harbin amounted to 3,000 to 4,000 then, the atmosphere was harmonious, and all was quiet for Sato until the Revolution. His knowledge of the Russian language proved handy, considering that about 40% of the Harbin population was Russian. The city was the administrative center of the Chinese Eastern Railway. It was founded by Russians in 1898 and deemed to be Russia's protectorate despite formally belonging to China. According to Sato, a majority of the city's residents were Chinese, but Russians were in military and administrative control, and the Russian influence in Harbin was as big as it was in any authentically Russian city [Sato 1963, p. 116].

A drastic change in the Harbin situation occurred after the 1917 Revolution, as the Bolsheviks were expanding their influence towards the Urals. The Japanese feared that the Revolution could spread into the Far East and

worried about the future of their sizeable investment in tsarist government bonds and trade with tsarist Russia.

Sato was one of those calling for Japan's soonest invasion of the Far East. Due to his profound concern, he sent a telegram to Envoy G. Hayashi to Beijing on December 6, 1917, to say that it might be necessary to deploy Japanese troops to Manchuria. Sato kept insisting on the intervention, and sent telegrams to his former superior, Foreign Minister Motono, asking for Japanese troops' assistance to the Chinese army fighting Bolsheviks. Sato feared that Germany would seize the chance, take over Siberian natural resources, and keep Japan away from those. He said Japan should initiate the intervention to maintain the balance of forces in Asia [Lensen 1970, p. 50]. By the time the Japanese government decided to send troops, Sato believed that the armed intervention would be too late and useless [Sato 1963, p. 129].

At the same time, Sato was looking for a candidate capable of organizing the anti-revolutionary people's movement. He met with General V. Domanevsky in early February 1918, and, later on, negotiated with Ataman G. Semyonov, who asked for military assistance. The Japanese believed that Semyonov could turn the Transbaikal region into a strategic base and a barrier against Bolshevism. Sato urged the central authorities to give rapid assistance to Semyonov [Lensen 1970, p. 52]. He was also probing the possibility of reaching an agreement with the Chinese Eastern Railway administrator, Gen. D. Khorvat, and offered weapons and 15,000 to 17,000 troops for assisting in the establishment of the new government. Yet Khorvat declined the offer.

In November 1918, after A. Kolchak became the Supreme Ruler of the Russian State, Sato was assigned to Omsk and spent almost four months there. The diplomat recalled that Kolchak mostly relied on the assistance of the United Kingdom, the United States, and France, and said he had an impression that Kolchak was not very interested in receiving aid from Japan [Sato 1963, p. 130]. Upon his return to Harbin, Sato sent a telegram to Foreign Minister K. Uchida proposing an active policy for Siberia, which would be advantageous for Russia and the allies. He proposed that the use of military force be avoided as much as possible and called for focusing on economic measures towards reconstructing Russia. The consul general believed that the allies should pull out troops from West Siberia and resolve problems at negotiations. Sato insisted on supporting Russia's unity and opposed territorial ambitions of some of his fellow countrymen [Gubler 1975, p. 59].

Soon enough Sato came to believe that Japan should renounce the policy of force in relation to Russia. His belief strengthened later on, and he became known as an advocate of internationalism and open economic cooperation.

Years in Europe

A significant part of Sato's biography was linked to his work in Europe. After the mission to Harbin, he was appointed first secretary in Bern, and

moved to Paris in April 1921 to become the right-hand man of Ambassador K. Ishii. Before France, Ishii had been the ambassador to the United States and the foreign minister, and his assignment to Paris demonstrated the importance ascribed by the Japanese government to the country. Future Prime Minister H. Ashida, future Foreign Minister and Ambassador to China M. Tani, and future Ambassador to Paris M. Kato were amongst young diplomats working together with Sato in Paris.

Japan, a winner of WWI, took an active part in the formation of a new system of international relations. The Land of the Rising Sun joined the League of Nations in 1919. It partook at least in ten international conferences held from 1920 till 1923.

Sato's activity at international conferences played an essential role in his career. The work in Europe not only introduced him to many people but also earned him the reputation of a top-notch specialist in multilateral diplomacy or even "the greatest Japanese expert on conferences," according the contemporaries' memoirs. As early as in the beginning of the 1920s, Sato was linked to key international events held in Genoa, Lausanne, and The Hague.

Sato recalled it was when he became imbued with the liking for the young Soviet state. The Japanese diplomat was very impressed by Chicherin's speech at the Genoa Conference, his eloquence and fluent knowledge of foreign languages. Japan recognized the Soviet Union several years after the conference, but Sato started advocating the soonest establishment of relations with Moscow much earlier [Sato 1963, p. 162].

Sato was appointed counsel to Warsaw in late August 1923. Poland acquired independence shortly before that, it had friendly relations with Japan, there were no difficult problems to resolve, and the tour of Sato was pleasant and quiet. The attitude of Tokyo towards its northern neighbor started changing by that time, and Japan and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations in January 1925. Sato was recalled from Poland and ordered to open the new embassy in Moscow. He came to Moscow in March 1925 and spent four months dealing with organizational issues, including the search for a proper building to accommodate the embassy. The first Japanese embassy to the Soviet Union moved into a house at 43, Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street. Presumably, the house was once occupied by Gen. A. Suvorov.

Diplomatic service in Europe made Sato a witness to and participant in major events in Japan's foreign political life. It is not surprising that in early 1926 he was offered to head the Japanese mission to the League of Nations. Sato declined the offer at first as he was more enthusiastic about going to some "uncivilized" place. He was long dreaming of working in South America, which was seen as an honorary exile in the Foreign Ministry's ranking. The diplomat was finally persuaded by his father into accepting the assignment.

Sato was Japan's ambassador to the League of Nations from January 1927 till December 1930. He took part in keynote multilateral events, among

them the Geneva Naval Conference, the London Naval Disarmament Conference, etc. He kept participating in the activity of the League of Nations after he was appointed ambassador to Belgium in December 1930.

Meanwhile, Tokyo's reckless military plans were gaining pace, and the advancement of Japanese forces in China triggered an international response. Over and over again, Sato had to tell the League of Nations that Japan was trying to restore order in China, but he could feel the increasing international isolation of the country and was practically the only one opposed to foreign diplomats. The intervention in Manchuria and the establishment of Manchukuo in March 1932 severed relations between Japan and the League of Nations. In 1933, Sato and S. Nagaoka were members of the Matsuoka delegation to meetings of the League of Nations, which discussed the report of the Litton commission.

The report called the establishment of Manchukuo a breach of the Nine-Power Treaty. Following the instructions from Tokyo, Matsuoka declared Japan's withdrawal from the organization. Sato, Nagaoka, and Matsuoka saw the impossibility to defend their stance on Manchukuo and the withdrawal from the League of Nations as a diplomatic failure, while military members of the delegation felt triumphant [Nish 1993, p. 220]. Most Japanese supported the developments in Manchuria and the adamant diplomatic course of Tokyo, the press hailed successes of Japanese diplomats, and Matsuoka was welcomed to the home country as a hero. Sato did not question the lawfulness of Japanese interests in Manchukuo but regretted Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, as it increased the country's international isolation and had implications for the future of the organization itself [Sato 1963, p. 286].

Sato continued his diplomatic service in France, after he was appointed ambassador to Paris in 1933. While in France, Sato received his nephew, Kunio Maekawa, a future acclaimed architect, and helped arrange his internship with legendary Le Corbusier. Sato, who fluently spoke French, showed interest in art and culture, and actively participated in social events, was well liked and respected by his European colleagues.

Over the years of work in Europe, Sato visited practically every important location and participated in crucial diplomatic events of the time. Despite prospects of his career, he was hoping to resign after the end of the French tour in January 1937 and dedicate himself to academic activity. The events in the Far East convinced him that the use of force against China was a mistake. He eventually realized that international cooperation and negotiations with other countries would better suit Japan's interests than the attempts to ensure the achievement of its interests by military methods.

Foreign minister

Sato returned from Paris at a time of another government reshuffle in Tokyo. The political crisis of January 1937 led to the resignation of the Hirota

Cabinet, known for its irreconcilable attitude to China and anti-communism. Gen. S. Hayashi was vested with the power to form the next cabinet. Sato, fresh from his French tour, appeared to be a good candidate for foreign minister. The diplomat did not believe the news of his promotion at first; he thought that 31 years spent in foreign tours prevented him from being fully aware of intricacies of the domestic political situation. He accepted the post on condition that he would be allowed to promote his political views. Sato's main idea was that Japan should act from the position of pacifism and international cooperation, try to resolve the conflict with China through equal negotiations, maintain friendly relations with the Soviet Union, and improve relations with the United Kingdom [Kurihara 1981, p. 4].

The appointment of Sato, who had the reputation of a liberal, was if not a turn, then at least a certain deviation from the former foreign political course. The main task of the new minister was to cushion negative implications of the Anti-Comintern Pact for Japan; he tried not to accentuate or even belittle the significance of that document. The very first speeches of Sato reeked of friendliness towards the United States and the United Kingdom, and even the Soviet Union whenever that was possible [Molodyakov 2006, p. 194].

Sato disapproved of the Anti-Comintern Pact in parliament and said that Germany gained more from that document than Japan. Berlin was worried by Sato's speech, which described the Pact as 'unavoidable evil' and said it was adopted for technical considerations at best and had the police nature due to the existence of Comintern. Sato told the German ambassador that "the Anti-Comintern Pact deteriorated Russian-Japanese relations and made the conclusion of a fishing agreement impossible" [Latyshev I. A. (ed.) 1987, p. 143].

Sato believed that the principal area of Japan's foreign policy should be the participation in an open international economic system, which will help the country industrialize and develop exports. This made him different from those who advocated self-sufficiency in foreign policy and the course towards military expansion [Irie 2013, p. 37].

The progressive outlook of Sato was welcomed by the Anglo-Saxon world, which even called it the New Deal of Japanese diplomacy. The UK and the United States hailed Sato's diplomacy but China was not that enthusiastic. The Nanking government was not exactly happy with the new moderate policy of Tokyo.

The response from the Kremlin, which appreciated the conciliatory nature of the new minister's initiatives but did not conceal its disappointment, was rather reserved. Sato believed that the existence of Comintern was an impediment to an improvement of Japanese-Russian relations but thought that Japan, as a neighbor, should do its best to resolve problems in relations with the Soviet Union. Moscow said the relations would not improve until Japan renounced the Anti-Comintern Pact.

The home country's reaction to the diplomacy of Sato was mixed. Many saw his speeches as criticism of the previous course, and he continued to be attacked for the statements he made at parliament hearings for a long time. Some feared that conciliatory diplomacy would result in misunderstanding of Japan's policy for China, especially Manchukuo, while Sato called for stop trying to separate northern provinces from China, supported China's territorial integrity but did not doubt the lawful existence of Manchukuo. Still, some politicians viewed his remarks as a threat to the status quo in Manchuria.

The rapid fall of the Hayashi government in May 1937 prevented Sato from fully implementing his foreign political program, and his undertakings were soon curtailed. The right-wingers and the military prevailed in politics; they accused Sato of being weak and undecided, and called his outlook excessively liberal.

After he left the foreign minister's position, Sato remained a diplomatic advisor and provided consultations to Foreign Minister S. Togo, amongst others. He was still sent on high-profile and delicate diplomatic missions. One of those missions was the trip to Italy and Germany in summer 1940 in the context of Japan's initiative to resume negotiations on enhancing the Anti-Comintern Pact disrupted in August 1939. Special Representative Sato visited Rome and Berlin to clarify the state of European affairs, and to probe intentions of the leaders of fascist states. The negotiations held by Sato were part of diplomatic efforts, which resulted in the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact in September 1940 and formalized the military union of the three countries.

Ambassador to the USSR

The demand for Sato's diplomatic talent resumed with the beginning of WWII. Japan, Germany, and Italy declared war on the United States, and the Soviet Union joined the Declaration by United Nations signed by the United States and the UK in January 1942. The sides actually found themselves on the opposite sides of the barricades, but the Neutrality Pact concluded on April 13, 1941, stayed in place.

In the beginning of war, Japan focused on the "southern sector" and applied a wait-and-see approach to the hostilities against the Soviet Union. Japan kept preparing to fight the Soviet Union but delayed the engagement, being cautious after Germany's defeat on the Soviet front in the winter of 1941–1942.

It was decided at the coordination meeting of the General Staff and the government in January 1942 to maintain a normal relationship between Japan and the Soviet Union, and to prevent the Soviet Union, for one part, and the UK and the U.S., for the other part, from strengthening their ties [Hasegawa 2005, p. 19]. Sato was appointed ambassador to the Soviet Union in March 1942 for accomplishing this mission; he replaced Gen. Yo. Tatekawa

who was known for pro-Germany views and predicting the approaching victory of Germany over the Soviet Union. The appointment of Sato, an experienced career diplomat advocating preservation of the Pact, showed that the moderate attitude to the Soviet Union prevailed. It was a compromise between those who had no faith in Germany's victory and wanted to broker peace between Moscow and Berlin, so that Germany could focus on war against the Anglo-American bloc, and the military counting on the victory of Hitler, which would enable Japan to take over eastern parts of the Soviet Union.

Sato believed that Japan should exercise extreme caution and advised against attacking the Soviet Union, or doing anything that could endanger relations with Moscow. Sato invited his old friend, G. Morishima, to be the embassy's counselor. Morishima, a long-standing opponent of the rapprochement between Japan and Germany, had to resign from Matsuoka's Foreign Ministry because of his views. The diplomats were instructed to ensure the Soviet Union's commitment to the Neutrality Pact and to limit their activity to the daily routine [Cherevko, Kirichenko 2006, p. 144].

The possibility of the Axis powers' winning over the Soviet Union by brokering peace between Moscow and Germany was discussed at the coordination meeting between the General Staff and the government in November 1941 [Cherevko, Kirichenko 2006, p. 140]. The decision was revised in March, following German victories, but Foreign Minister Togo continued to insist on the need for brokering Soviet-German peace. In the summer of 1942, Togo instructed Sato, who was evacuated to Kuibyshev together with the entire diplomatic corps, to visit Moscow from time to time, use the new fishing convention and other issues as an occasion to speak about peace, and lay groundwork for immediately starting mediating efforts should relevant orders be received. Sato said he was convinced of the possibility to maintain neutral relations between Japan and the Soviet Union but did not see a possibility of brokering peace between the Soviet Union and Germany. Togo said he managed to persuade Sato by emphasizing that Japan should do everything to restore peace between Germany and Russia [Togo 1996, p. 295–396].

In July 1942, Japan declined Germany's request for joint operations against the Soviet Union, and the General Staff agreed to a policy less dependent on Germany, and allowed Togo initiate peace efforts. Togo stepped down in September 1942 in protest against the establishment of the Ministry of Greater East Asia, and the peacekeeping efforts were paused.

Germany's defeat at Stalingrad crushed hopes for seizing a chance and attacking the Soviet Union. By the end of 1942, Japan faced problems on the Pacific Theater of WWII, which started with the defeat in the Battle of Midway in June 1942.

Being concerned over the exacerbating situation, Sato sent Morishima to Tokyo in December 1942 to inform the government about the emergency and the need for improving relations with the Soviet Union. Sato's message

delivered by Morishima said that the deteriorating military situation and Germany's defeat in the Battle of Stalingrad negated the perspective of Germany's total victory on the Soviet front. The Soviet counter-offensive would intensify and push the German forces outside the Soviet territory. Japan should strengthen its position on the Pacific to speak the language of force with the United States and the UK. Sato believed that the first step towards peace should be an improvement of relations with the Soviet Union. The telegrams sent by Sato to Foreign Minister Tani in the later period indicated that Japan should give back the oil and coal concessions in Northern Sakhalin as a gesture of goodwill and a compromise that would improve Soviet-Japanese relations [Lensen 1970, p. 251]. Tani took an interest in Sato's proposals but they were not developed any further because of the replacement of the foreign minister in April 1943, and Morishima's mission resulted in failure.

Sato's proposals were reconsidered after the progress of war forced Japan to take additional steps towards the rapprochement with the Soviet Union. At a meeting held on June 19, 1943, the government and the empire's General Staff adopted a document "On the Policy for the Soviet Union." Instead of Japan brokering peace between the Soviet Union and Germany, the document envisaged stabilization of bilateral relations and "peace in the north" by resolving protracted problems, such as oil and coal concessions in Northern Sakhalin and fishing issues [Hasegawa 2005, p. 20].

The promise of returning Japan's concessions in Northern Sakhalin to the Soviet Union was made in Matsuoka's secret message attached to the Neutrality Pact, but due to the outbreak of war the promise had to be shelved, and the Soviet Union was not insistent, fearing that Japan might attack it [Slavinsky 1995, p. 171]. After the correlation of forces changed in June 1943, the Soviet Union raised the question of concessions again, and exhibited a firmer stance. Japan had to yield and acknowledge that the Soviet demands were founded: the disregard of Matsuoka's promise to shut down the concessions could have been viewed as a breach of the Neutrality Pact and prompted the Soviet Union to assist the U.S. and the UK. The negotiations conducted by Sato on behalf of Japan lasted for about eight months and ended on March 30, 1944, with the signing of a protocol, which liquidated the coal and oil concessions. Given the international situation, above all the situation on WWII fronts unfavorable for countries of the Axis, Privy Council chair Ishii hailed the signing of the protocol as a remarkable success of Japanese diplomacy and praised Sato in the presence of the emperor [Chevko, Kirichenko 2006, p. 157].

The Japanese deemed the move successful for the following reasons. First of all, the agreement was conditioned on the simultaneous signing of a document, which extended the Soviet-Japanese convention of 1928 for five years; the convention gave Japan the right to catch fish and crab duty-free in some areas of the Soviet territorial waters. Besides, the agreement was con-

cluded in furtherance of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact of 1941, i.e. indirectly reiterated the Soviet obligation not to declare war on Japan together with its allies [Cherevko, Kirichenko 2006, p. 157].

Alongside negotiations on giving back the concessions, Foreign Minister M. Shigemitsu made a number of attempts to encourage a separate peace agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany, and proposed to send a high-ranking special mission to Moscow for that purpose. Tokyo put forward the initiative in September 1943. The Japanese administration expected a truce on the Soviet-German front to facilitate the strategic position of Germany. Secondly, the Soviet government's consent would imply a breach of commitments to the allies and could have resulted in a breakup of the anti-Hitler coalition. In both cases, Japan hoped to protect itself from the Soviet Union's engagement in the war in the Pacific [Zhukov (ed.) 1998, p. 461]. This is the cause of the continuous and unambiguous hints and remarks of Japan indicating the wish to strengthen the relations of neutrality and transform the Neutrality Pact into a non-aggression pact [Slavinskiy 1995, p. 182]. The Soviet government rejected Shigemitsu's initiatives in 1943, since it was not interested in holding negotiations with Berlin.

In April 1944, Sato conveyed the minister's wish for sending a special mission to the Soviet Union to discuss ways of improving bilateral relations, including the conclusion of a trade agreement and resolution of border issues. Sato was against the mission, and did not share the opinion of those who deemed the existence of the Neutrality Pact insufficient and aspired for a treaty, which would give more security and other advantages to Japan [Lensen 1970, p. 253]. Just like Sato predicted, V. Molotov did not accept Japan's offer because the mission would have aroused suspicion of the allies. Shigemitsu made another attempt in early September 1944; this time he planned to send to Moscow former Prime Minister K. Hirota, who had been the ambassador to the Soviet Union in the 1930s and was believed to be one of the best experts on Russia.

Molotov turned down the new proposal, considering that the arrival of this mission in Moscow would have been viewed in the country and abroad as another proposal of peace between the Soviet Union and Germany, which Japan already put forward in 1943. Sato was persuading Molotov at a meeting that the mission aimed at strengthening and furthering bilateral relations, but felt pessimistic about the idea and believed it was a sign of the Japanese government's confusion.

The foreign political and military position of Japan started deteriorating in early 1945, and the Americans landed on the Japanese territory for the first time; it became obvious that Germany would suffer a defeat within several months. The Japanese establishment started looking for ways towards peace compromise. The probing started in the beginning of 1945 in three areas: there were attempts at concluding a separate peace agreement with Chiang Kai-shek's China, starting peace talks with the United States and the United

Kingdom, and, finally, using the Soviet Union as a broker of such negotiations or at least preventing it from engaging in the war [Latyshev I. A. (ed.) 1987, p. 234].

As early as in February-March 1945, the Japanese kept indicating their wish for Moscow's mediation at private meetings. They were still hopeful of the Soviet Union's assistance after the Soviet Union renounced the Neutrality Pact in April 1945. Japan hoped that the Pact would stay in effect for another year, after the Soviet Union assured them the relationship would not change. On May 14, 1945, the Supreme War Council instructed the Foreign Ministry to take a number of diplomatic steps for the purpose of 1) preventing the Soviet Union from joining the war on Japan; 2) achieving a favorable attitude of the Soviet Union to Japan; 3) making peace with the UK and the U.S. with the Soviet mediation [Slavinsky 1995, p. 281].

The government was counting on the negotiations conducted by Hirota, who was tasked with probing the stance of Soviet Ambassador Ya. Malik on the possibility of brokering. At the negotiations that started on June 3, 1945, Japan proposed that a bilateral agreement on the joint maintenance of peace in East Asia and non-aggression be signed. Meanwhile, Sato was becoming more and more aware of where Japan was headed and was surprised at the naivety of Hirota and Togo who were discussing the future of Manchuria at the negotiations with Malik while Japan was on the brink of a catastrophe. The diplomat believed that urgent measures were necessary, but the government spent a month playing "childish games" [Lensen 1970, p. 269]. From a conversation with Molotov that followed, Sato realized that the people's commissar had little interest in the negotiations between Hirota and Malik, and the whole negotiating process was about probing each other's position.

All this time the ambassador kept warning the authorities about the danger of incorrectly assessing the situation. On June 8, Sato said in his letter to Morishima in Tokyo, "The Soviet Union may suddenly renounce its neutrality at an appropriate moment, and the Red Army may attack the Kwantung Army in Manchuria. Resistance might have been possible earlier, but it is unrealistic now. Airstrikes on Japan will intensify if the Soviet Union joins the war and gives the UK and the U.S. access to its airbases in Siberia." [Lensen 1970, p. 268].

Meetings between Hirota and Malik had no political consequences, and Japan focused the effort on Moscow in June 1945; it was seeking consent of J. Stalin and Molotov to the visit of a high mission led by the emperor's special representative, Prince F. Konoe, to Moscow shortly before their departure for the Potsdam Conference.

Sato believed it would be impossible to persuade the Soviet Union into taking Japan's side while Japan was not demonstrating the determination to stop the war. "In these days, with the enemy air raids accelerated and intensified, is there any meaning in showing that our country has reserve strength for a war of resistance, or in sacrificing the lives of hundreds of thousands of

conscripts and millions of other residents of cities and metropolitan areas? ” he wrote to Togo on July 12 [Peace feelers..., No 1382].

On July 13, Sato followed instructions from Tokyo and informed Molotov of the emperor’s intention to stop the war and send Konoe to Moscow. The ambassador wrote home that Japan had no choice but an unconditional surrender or something like that [Toland, 1970, p. 758]. The peace proposal should approve most of the enemy’s conditions with the exception of the protection of the fundamental character of Japanese form of government [Peace feelers..., , No 1427]. The ambassador warned that the Russians would not consider the Japanese proposal should it consist of phrases beautiful but somewhat remote from the facts and empty in content [Peace feelers..., No 1382]. Just like Sato feared, S. Lozovsky said on July 18 that the peace initiative was not concrete, and the purpose of Konoe’s mission was unclear.

On July 20, Sato sent a long telegram to Tokyo and fearlessly expressed an opinion on Japan’s future, which strongly disagreed with the government’s position. “Since there is no longer any real chance of success, I believe that it is the duty of the statesmen to save the nation by coming quickly to a decision to lay down our arms. [...] it is inevitable that the people will have to endure the heavy pressure of the enemy for a long period of time, but the nation will live on, and we may be able to recover our former prosperity again after several decades.” [Peace feelers..., No 1427].

Tokyo kept categorically rejecting the unconditional capitulation and was indignant at the telegrams from Moscow. The opinion that the efforts are futile, Japan will share the fate of Germany unless it surrenders, the Soviet Union will attack Manchuria after August 1, and Japan should get ready for the unconditional capitulation did not increase Sato’s popularity with the Foreign Ministry and the government [Brooks 1968, p. 16]. The ambassador was accused of being unreliable and compromising, and demands were made that Togo replace him. Yet Togo had trust in Sato and could not replace him while the search for ways out of the war was still in progress.

Sato met with Lozovsky again on July 25, and conveyed Togo’s message that the visit of Konoe aimed at explaining specifics of the Japanese intention to stop the war and establish post-war cooperation between Japan and the Soviet Union. The Potsdam Declaration of the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, which called for the immediate and unconditional capitulation of Japan, was published the day after.

The declaration caused a big confusion in Japan. The foreign minister proposed that they study the declaration, instead of turning it down. The military commanders believed it would be premature to speak of the capitulation as long as Japanese forces were occupying vast territories outside Japan. While waiting for the Soviet Union’s response, Prime Minister K. Suzuki issued a statement which said that Tokyo would ignore the ultimatum given in the Potsdam Declaration.

New attempts at inquiring of Lozovsky about the attitude to Konoe's visit resulted in failure. Sato believed that Stalin did not see any need for reaching an agreement with Japan. The ambassador wrote to Tokyo that the attempts at arranging the Japanese mission would be futile if Stalin were unable to shake the will of the United States and the UK, which insisted on the unconditional surrender on terms required by the Potsdam Declaration [Peace feelers..., No 1480]. The diplomat was trying hard to explain to the administration that the Soviet Union would gain nothing from assisting Japan, but Tokyo clung to the idea that the Soviet Union would come to its rescue.

Sato learned that Molotov returned from Berlin on August 6, and immediately requested a meeting but was received only on August 8. The people's commissar told him that the Soviet Union had joined the Potsdam Declaration and would declare a war on Japan on August 9. Sato was prepared for the worst, but kept thinking until the very last moment that Moscow would agree to broker peace. The news that the Soviet Union was joining the war on Japan was a shock.

After the war

Sato came back to the Embassy and told his subordinates that all of them had become internees. Their freedom and communication with the outside world were limited, but the terms of stay of the Japanese in the Soviet Union were rather mild: there was neither violence nor hate towards them [Lensen 1970, p. 297].

Sato was allowed to go back to his residence, and diplomats and journalists staying at the Metropol Hotel moved to the Embassy. All they could read at the Embassy was Soviet newspapers, *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, so neither Sato nor the rest could grasp the horrid consequences of the atomic bombings. The former ambassador was depressed by the news of Japan's capitulation and occupation. He recalled that he felt like he was pierced by the sword and bled out [Sato 1963, p. 501].

The need for taking care of his subordinates was distracting Sato from painful thoughts. He was allowed to send one telegram per month to inform Tokyo about health of the employees. The Embassy's life was strictly regulated, because none of them knew when they might return to Japan. Duties were divided between Embassy inhabitants who took turns to do shopping, clean up, and cook. Sato was working, too. He helped sweep and clean the grand hall of his residence, which became the dining room. Seeking to keep his people busy, Sato organized billiards tournaments, poetic contests, and debates on global problems. They even published newspapers: *Hati Hati Shimbun* (The Newspaper of August 8; August 8 is the date when the Soviet Union declared war on Japan), and *Fukko Shimbun* (Revival). The literary magazine *Boruga* (Volga) was published once a month, and nearly every issue published haiku by Sato.

The Japanese were informed on April 8, 1946, that they would be repatriated. The Embassy and the residence were seized, but the employees were allowed to take their personal belongings. Sato arrived in Tokyo on May 30. The former ambassador delivered a report on his mission to the Soviet Union to the emperor. He was surprised when the emperor summoned him again several days later. The content of their meeting remained secret, but the ambassador recalled that Hirohito felt lonely, since many members of his entourage either died or were imprisoned in Sugamo.

Sato's diplomatic career was over, but he never stopped participating in the political life. Many high-ranking officials were barred from politics, and he became one of the few senior veterans of the Foreign Ministry cleared of war crimes by the Allied Power's General Headquarters. The knowledge of foreign languages and traditions of Western countries was good for his further career. Such senior diplomats as S. Yoshida, K. Shidehara, M. Shigemitsu, and H. Ashida were promoted to high positions in post-war Japan. Soon enough, Yoshida offered Sato to take charge of the Foreign Service Training Institute established for coaching the next generation of diplomats for the times when Japan regains independence and restores its relations with the world. He also accepted a seat on the Privy Council.

The Japanese authorities were reconfigured in the process of democratic reforms. Sato decided to participate in the first post-war parliamentary election and ran for the House of Councilors from his native prefecture of Aomori. Later on, Sato chaired a small independent association, Ryokufukai (Green Wind Society). The association rapidly grew over the first years of its existence (it had 97 members in 1950) and became influential in the House of Councilors, yet the influence reduced after the unification of conservative forces in 1955.

Sato chaired the Foreign Affairs Commission of the parliament's upper house. After the death of his old friend, former diplomat Ts. Matsudaira, Sato was elected President of the House of Councilors. He was reelected three times and spent 18 years working in the House of Councilors.

After the war, Sato proved himself in another field of activity related to his former work at the League of Nations. Over the years, he stayed in touch with a group of former Geneva coworkers, and was offered to head the United Nations Association of Japan after they joined the association on December 17, 1947. He chaired the Association from 1947 to 1970.

Sato remained a public figure despite his advanced age. His contribution to the cause of international peace was rewarded in October 1970 when he received the Kajima Peace Award. An issue of the magazine *Kokusai Jihyo* (International Affairs) released next month was dedicated to the activity of this diplomat and politician.

Sato died of a heart failure at the age of 89 on December 18, 1971. A representative of the Imperial Court extended condolences to the family, which was another proof of the authority and respect enjoyed by Sato in his country.

* * *

Sato bore witness and took direct part in one of the most dramatic periods in the history of Japan. He was part of the state machinery, which led Japan to collapse, but tried to promote liberal values even under those circumstances. No matter what position Sato held, he was never afraid to defend his point of view, and proclaimed the aspiration for peace and mutually advantageous cooperation the primary national interest of his country,

The diplomatic talent of Sato helped stably maintain a good relationship between Tokyo and Moscow in the midst of war. Complicated bilateral issues were tackled. Soviet People's Commissar Molotov lauded Sato's work. According to Molotov, the two countries established normal relations when Sato was the ambassador in Moscow, although there were plenty of misunderstandings before [Slavinsky 1995, p. 247].

However, the circumstances of that time narrowed space for diplomatic maneuver, and, in the end, other strategic considerations determined the outcome of the war. Being the ambassador to the Soviet Union, Sato soberly assessed the situation and did his best to avoid heavier casualties. Perhaps, the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki could have been avoided, and hundreds of thousands of lives would have been saved if his voice had been heard.

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