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DOIHARA, Kenji

b. Aug. (7) 1883 - Commander in Chief of the Japanese Air Force.  
Address: War Department, Tokyo, Japan

Thin, stocky little Major General Kenji Doihara, in 1942 commander in chief of the Japanese Air Force, is an acknowledged master of intrigue. His reputation was not made in the air, but in Manchuria and Northern China, where he spent long years as a secret agent, professional propagandist, and soldier-diplomat. A man with very strong "Pan-Asian" feelings who is supposed to have had "more Chinese acquaintances... than any living Chinese in active political life," he originated the pre-1937 Japanese policy of civilizing China's northern provinces from those of the south by fomenting and encouraging "autonomy" movements and setting up puppet governments, and he tried almost singlehanded to carry it out. To a great extent he was successful.

Born a poor boy in Otagawa, Japan, in August, 1883, Doihara became a socialist in China at the Japanese Military Academy, from which he had graduated first in his class. Later he went on to attend the Military Staff College, from which he was graduated in 1911. According to Joan Gunther, one of his early jobs was to support the Anfu group of Chinese leaders and radical Peking (later renamed Peking) with Japanese connivance and some concealment to the Japanese at outrageous prices; and when the clique broke up he smuggled its leader to safety in a laundry basket. He served for years as an adviser to the Chinese Ministry of War, but his contract was finally liquidated when he fell under suspicion. Next he went to Peking to become assistant military attache to the Japanese Legation under General Honjo. He was already known as an authority on men and affairs in the most distant sections of China, and his talents were soon being put to maximum use.

In 1931 General Honjo was appointed commander of the Japanese Kwantung forces, and he immediately made Doihara (then a mere colonel) his chief intelligence officer with the title of chief of the Bureau of Military Operations and Control at Mukden, Manchuria, the "nerve center" of the Army's secret service. It is Doihara who was supposedly responsible not only for conceiving the dashu plan which resulted in the "Mukden Incident" and the subsequent occupation of Manchuria by Japanese troops, but also for bringing from Tokyo secret instructions to General Honjo which gave the latter full discretionary powers to act. When a Japanese officer was assassinated Doihara spread rumors that the assassin had been protected by Chinese authorities. Tension grew. Finally, on September 18, 1931, a manufactured "bombing" on the Chinese Manchurian Railway line at Mukden, ascribed by the Japanese to Chinese terrorists, brought the Kwantung army into action. The Sino-Japanese conflict had begun.

Doihara acted as Mayor of Mukden for a time, then in November 1931, went to Tientsin. The disturbances there coincided mysteriously with the arrival of the suave Japanese with masculine features and a mustache that slightly resembled Hitler's. It is said that Doihara with certain Chinese reactionary groups, had carefully denuded them; and that he personally engineered the "escape" from Tientsin of the Manchian "Loy Laperor" Pu-Yi, who, he thought, would make a suitable puppet ruler for the as yet non-existent state of Manchukuo. During the riots Pu-Yi was spirited away to a

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seaside resort near Dairen on a Japanese ship -- some say against his will. He and Doihara were old acquaintances, for seven years before Doihara had smuggled him out of Peiping when his life was in danger.

While foreign correspondents were beginning to cable home tales of the "Lawrence of Manchuria" (whom none of them, however, had yet succeeded in interviewing), Doihara, on January 26, 1932, was transferred to Harbin to assume the post of head of the Special Service Department. In spite of Japanese successes in the region to the north and east of Harbin, Harbin itself had been causing the Japanese a great deal of trouble, and Doihara acted so successfully there that certain merchants were persuaded to "beg" the Japanese to occupy the locality. The Kwantung Army was glad to comply, and ten days after Doihara's appearance there, Harbin was in its ambitious hands.

As Doihara took over his new functions, he announced: "The independence of Manchuria and Manchukuo is inevitable, for this is the policy resolved upon. In spite of everything that the League of Nations can say, neither Chiang Kai-shek nor Chang Hsueh-liang will succeed in changing the situation." On February 16, Manchukuo proclaimed its "independence"; on February 19, the Pan-Manchurian Conference at Mukden elected Hsuan Tung (the boy Emperor Pu-Yi) as its provisional President; and a little later Doihara was promoted to the rank of Major General.

New Manchuria was under Japanese control. Doihara carried his intrigues to Mongolia, where the climate was also favorable. There more than one autonomous Prince was persuaded (or at least persuaded to express the opinion) that Chahar "would only serve its best economic interest by incorporating with Manchuria", and by June 1935 North Chahar was being occupied by Japanese troops. "It remained for Doihara to push the Japanese armies in the direction of Peiping and to encircle north China in Tokyo's direct sphere of influence." The idea was to find Chinese puppets who would form an autonomous area of the five northern provinces, divorcing Nanking (then the seat of the Chinese national government) and letting Japan conquer them "without the loss of life of a single Japanese taxpayer.". This sociable little man with "confident manners and a liking for negotiation" was soon commuting back and forth from one northern province to another, conferring with innumerable Chinese officials, civilian and military, important and petty, in power and out -- and always letting himself be quoted as to "China's Sincerity and Japan's Role as the Chief Stabilizing Force in the Orient."

By October 1935, there were farmers' riots and autonomists' demonstrations in Hsinagho and Doihara began playing up General Sung Cheh-yuen as head of the projected independent state. But all was not well. The next month, if reports are true, the Japanese ambassador told Chiang Kai-shek that Tokyo would not support its "Colonel Lawrence's" separatist plans, and Chiang gave instructions to his northern war lords which resulted in their absence at a projected conference with Doihara in Peiping. Furious (he had blustered that if Chiang Kai-shek wouldn't sanction the plan eleven army divisions would be sent in by Japan), Doihara left for Tientsin. The East Hopei Autonomous Council was nevertheless proclaimed, with its capital at Tungchow within the Lemilitarized Zone on the outskirts of Peiping, and the Howei-Chehar Political Council, which weakened the Chinese hold on at least these two provinces was set up. John Gunther tells of some of Doihara's even less

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successful encounters with Chinese generals. One Wang Chen whom he was trying to keep from allegiance to Chiang Kai-shek got out of a rendezvous with him by pleading "stove-poisoning"; he had sat too near an overheated stove. Another war lord, threatened with death at Doihara's secret headquarters if he refused to accede to Japanese demands, took out his watch and announced: "how interesting. It is now 11:15. Before coming here I instructed my troops to massacre every Japanese in the city if I did not return to my headquarters by midnight. Good evening."

Usually, however, Doihara was successful in finding corruptible war lords. In 1936 he became head of the Special Service Department of the Kwantung Garrison in Mukden and Liaoan, his most publicized project to make the puppet emperor of Manchukuo "Emperor of All China" and return him to the Imperial Dragon Throne in Peking. Perhaps he would even have succeeded in this if the next year, with China and Japan finally at war, he had not returned to active military service as commander of the 14th Division. At the same time he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general.

Doihara's first military exploits against the Chinese were not so spectacular as his earlier activities; at least his division took a severe beating in a battle in Shensi. But it is possible that he still had things more important than fighting to do. In May 1939, at any rate it was reported that he had arrived in the south to prevail upon Kang Hsing-wei to hand a coalescence of Japanese puppet governments in China. What he is doing today in addition to his duties as head of Nippon's air force is anybody's guess.

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