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SUBJECT: 0 Conversations with Mr. Taketora OGATA, the Deputy Prime Minister

Transmitted herewith is a memorandum based on a series of conversations between an Embassy officer and Mr. Taketora Ogata, the Deputy Prime Minister. The most recent of these conversations, with which this memorandum is primarily concerned, took place on March 6, 1954.

For the Ambassador:

Samuel D. Berger
Samuel D. Berger
Counselor of Embassy (L.)

Enclosure:

- 1. Memorandum

FOR COORDINATION WITH State

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Encl. No. 1
Desp. No. 1307
From Tokyo

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Dinner With OGATA

1. Saturday night March 6, 1954, Deputy Prime Minister Ogata gave a small dinner party at the Imperial Hotel for my roommate Richard WETHERCUT, who will soon be returning to the States on leave. Besides Mr. Ogata and Mr. Nethercut those present were Mrs. Ogata, her son Shinjuro, Mr. John Knowles, and myself. Mrs. Ogata presented Mr. Nethercut with a dotera (dressing gown) which she had made herself. After dinner we talked for two or three hours, with Mr. Ogata doing most of the talking.

2. My roommates and I have had dinner with Mr. Ogata and his son twice before, once last July and once in December (on the latter occasion we showed the USIS movie "Bridge of Beauty," which Mr. Ogata had expressed an interest in). I am not sure how Mr. Ogata has managed to find time for these evenings with three junior Embassy officers. He does seem to enjoy himself though; the atmosphere has never been particularly strained, and he has never seemed especially eager to find excuses to break it off early and go home. Probably one reason is that he is grateful for the friendship and assistance extended his son; also, as he has said on one or two occasions, he apparently appreciates a chance to practice his English conversation, which he has had little opportunity to use in recent years. In these conversations Mr. Ogata usually talks more about the past than the present, and about what he has been reading; he is hesitant in discussing the present political situation, but then we have never tried very hard to lead the conversation into these channels. It is possible also that his preoccupation with the past is not entirely intentional; he is after all an old man, and as is the case with most old people the past seems to be clearer and more real in his mind than the present. For instance, though he can recall in vivid detail things that happened to him when he lived in London in 1920-21, he frequently seems to forget (unintentionally) details of what happened in the Diet a few weeks past, and has to ask his son's assistance in recalling them.

3. The following random notes, based chiefly on our conversation March 6 but including some of the things he has said in past talks and supported by what young Ogata has said about his father, may help to throw some light on the personality and character of Mr. Ogata.

I. Reading Habits

4. As Deputy Prime Minister charged with full responsibility for the Government during Prime Minister YOSHIDA's frequent absences from Tokyo Mr. Ogata probably has as full a schedule as any member of the Japanese Government. He has said that his day usually begins at 7:30 a.m., when visitors are already waiting to see him at his home, and usually ends around one in the morning (he has a press conference almost every night beginning at 10:30 or 11:00). Only at irregular intervals is he able to escape to Hakone over Saturday night and Sunday. In spite of this full schedule, however, he seems to find time to do a remarkable amount of reading - much of it apparently after he goes to bed in the early morning hours. His son has said that Mr. Ogata is an "expert" on Japanese history and is probably better informed on the subject than any other Government leader. In addition to his reading in Japanese history, however, Mr. Ogata evidently finds time to do a great deal of

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reading in English. At the moment he is reading Forrestal's Diaries, which he borrowed from us a few weeks ago (he is "greatly impressed" by Forrestal). Before Forrestal he read Robert Sherwood's Roosevelt and Hopkins and Stimson's On Active Service in Peace and War. In our conversations he has also referred to passages in Byrnes' Speaking Frankly, Iken's autobiography, John Gunther's Inside U.S. A., and Hugh Byas' Government by Assassination (he knew Byas quite well before the war and considers him one of the ablest prewar foreign correspondents in Japan). He had "of course" read Churchill's volumes on World War I and had gone through the Life magazine selections from the World War II series. (Some of these books he no doubt read before entering the Cabinet; while on the purge list during the Occupation he spent a good deal of time in the CIAE library at Hibiya.) According to his son, he has a large collection of books obtained during his stay in London in 1920-21, including a good many books on Fabian socialism. Incidentally, he regularly reads the bi-weekly commentary put out by the British Embassy. From Mr. Ogata's conversation it is apparent that he has read "seriously" rather than lightly; certainly he can recall details and passages much better than I can.

II. 1920-21 Trip Abroad

5. Mr. Ogata has often referred to his stay in a London boarding house as the "happiest time" of his life. He also often mentions his stay in the States during the Washington Conference of 1921 (which he reported for Asahi Shinbun). In the latter connection he deplures the break-up of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance - for which he thinks not only the United States but Lloyd George was responsible.

III. Asahi Shinbun Days

6. Mr. Ogata also looks back nostalgically upon the period when he was an editorial writer rather than an executive of the Asahi Shinbun. During this period he apparently became rather well acquainted with a number of foreigners and Americans in particular. Besides Hugh Byas, he particularly recalls AP President Ken Cooper, with whom he had many interesting talks. He has a picture at home of Cooper and himself taken by Ambassador Grew of which he is very proud.

IV. February 26 ('36) Incident (See Note below.)

7. Mr. Ogata's role as "defender of the press" in the February 26 incident is common knowledge in Japan. Every educated Japanese I have talked to is aware of what he did on this occasion and respects him for it. The common line of even more or less leftist intelligentsia is that Ogata may be a "reactionary," but of

NOTE: The Asahi Shinbun was among the primary targets selected by the young officers in the military uprising of February 26, 1936. After a night of murder, a group of officers and some 60 enlisted men invaded the Asahi building in downtown Tokyo. They were received by Ogata, who was then Asahi's Managing Director. Precisely what happened is not clear, but it appears that Ogata refused to "cooperate" and ordered them out. The soldiers thereupon ransacked the printing plant, damaging the presses and the type. Ogata is supposed to have intervened and to have "personally" defended the presses, and to have been wounded in the attempt. After doing maximum damage the soldiers withdrew. Asahi kept on publishing.

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course he did take a firm and courageous stand against the soldiers in 1936. I have often heard that Ogata still has a scar on his shoulder from a sword cut (the story may be apocryphal but it is widely believed). Mr. Ogata has never brought up his own role in this incident, but did once "reminisce" about the incident when I mentioned it. On the morning of February 26, he said, he presented himself to the army officers in the lobby, announced that he was in charge, and politely asked their business. He vividly recalls that as he was coming down in the elevator he could see the red-eyed sleepless young officer waiting below with his hand on his sword. After the incident was over he learned that this officer was Captain Motoaki WAKAHASHI, the one who had murdered Finance Minister WAKAHASHI during the preceding night.

V. The Abortive Roosevelt-Konoe Meeting

8. Ogata and many other Japanese "liberals" had put high hopes in the proposed Roosevelt-Konoe meeting on the high seas in 1941 and had been greatly disappointed when it failed to come off. As Ogata understood it, the idea was for Konoe to get away from Tojo and army control in Tokyo and "come to terms" with President Roosevelt. He would then send a wire directly to the Emperor, who it was understood would be willing to issue an Imperial order (on the pattern of the 1945 declaration) which Tojo and the militarists would have had to obey. No one but Konoe, a prince with close ties with the Emperor, could have "got through" to the Emperor and carried it off. Mr. Ogata still thinks it might have worked and is sorry that Secretary Hull apparently changed his mind "sudden" and opposed the meeting.

VI. Ogata's "Ultra-Rightist Connections

9. As far as I can see Ogata's reputation as an "ultra-rightist" stems primarily from his alleged ties with the Black Dragon society leader Mitsuru TOYAMA and the rightist propagandist and politician Seigo WAKANO, leader of the Toho-Kai (anti-Tojo group in the 1942 "Imperial Rule" Diet) who committed seppuku - presumably under pressure from Prime Minister Tojo - in October, 1943. Mr. Ogata was Vice-Chairman of Toyama's funeral committee (Ogata is aware of the passage in Government by Assassination in which Byas notes Ogata's reluctance to talk frankly about Toyama) and he took charge of Nakano's affairs after his death. In December 1951 he published a tribute to Nakano entitled "The Human Seigo Nakano." In our conversations Mr. Ogata has often referred to Toyama and asked lightly "if we still think" that he is an "ultra-rightist" (this is always an occasion for much laughter, and no one ever says yes or no). Mr. Ogata's son Shijuro also often talks about these "embarrassing" incidents. He defends his father by saying that his ties with Nakano (and his much more remote relations with Toyama) were based on a peculiarly Japanese sense of loyalty which it is difficult for foreigners to understand. He also points out that Mr. Ogata's open assistance to Nakano's family required considerable courage at a time when Nakano's bitter enemy Tojo controlled the Japanese state. Mr. Ogata's loyalty to Nakano, incidentally, was not a short term affair; Nakano's widow is presently employed as "supervisor" of Ogata's official residence and Nakano's son serves as one of Mr. Ogata's private secretaries.

VII. Ogata's Wartime Cabinet Service - Cabinet's Reaction to Potsdam Declaration

10. Mr. Ogata has been quoted as saying that he joined the Cabinet in 1944

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only because Japan's military adventure was already a "lost cause" and because he could therefore not honorably refuse the request to do so. In our conversations he has said only that he had absolutely no political experience prior to joining the Cabinet and that he joined only at the request of "others" whose opinions he respected.

11. I asked Mr. Ogata what the Cabinet's first reaction had been to the Potsdam Declaration and whether they had actually intended to accept or reject it. He said that "of course" the majority of the Cabinet had found it entirely acceptable; the only problem was how to accept it. If the Cabinet had publicly indicated approval, Cabinet members would certainly have been assassinated by the military. "Naturally" they were not concerned over their own safety but were aware that if they were killed there would be no one left to prevent the militarists from taking Japan over the precipice to total destruction. The Government's statement on the Potsdam Declaration had therefore been phrased with the utmost care so as not to rebuff the Allies entirely but at the same time to avoid arousing the militarists. The word "mokusatsu" which had finally been chosen ("mokusatsu" can be interpreted variously as "reject completely," "ignore," or "no comment") was probably unfortunate since it gave the Allies the impression the Potsdam Declaration was being categorically rejected. This, however, was certainly not the intention of the Japanese Cabinet.

VIII. The Higashi-Kuni Cabinet

12. Prince Higashi-Kuni had been selected to implement the surrender because happily he was both an Imperial Prince and a general in his own right, and thus had both Imperial prestige and military rank. Probably no one else could have carried out the surrender so smoothly.

IX. The Occupation

13. Mr. Ogata has never concealed his disapproval of Occupation reforms - including the purge, which kept him (and many of his friends) on the side lines for so many years. He thinks the purge was "very foolish" - one of those measures which showed that General MacArthur and the American people really knew very little about Japan (the General should have met more Japanese and seen more of the country, instead of isolating himself in the Dai Ichi Building and confining his travels to the drive between the Dai Ichi Building and the Embassy residence). He considers the education and police reforms also "ill-advised." He does ~~however~~ approve wholeheartedly of the land reform; he once said that in his opinion the land reform had probably prevented violence in the form of a farmers' revolt in the years immediately after the war. There is no noticeable bitterness or vindictiveness in Ogata's voice when he talks about the Occupation, certainly no self-pity over his enforced idleness as a result of the purge. In fact he displays the same detached curiosity in talking about the Occupation as he does in discussing other "interesting" historical phenomena in the more remote past. In our most recent conversation Mr. Ogata wondered out loud as to who had been primarily responsible for shaping American policy toward Japan in the immediate post-war years. From his recent reading he had the impression that Mr. Stanley Harnbeck of the Department of State must have had something to do with it.

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14. Regarding his own experiences during the Occupation war, Mr. Ogata has said that, happily, he did get a lot of sleep and rest - which he badly misses now. He did a lot of reading, played go and talked endlessly with his friends, and sometimes killed an afternoon watching sundlot baseball games. His son once said that his father actually spent most of the time idling around the house and "getting in the way."

I. Ogata and Yoshida

15. Mr. Ogata seems to enjoy talking about Prime Minister Yoshida. He takes great relish in telling innocuous anecdotes about "Yoshida" and making fun of him in a friendly sort of way. He is always respectful toward Mr. Yoshida and sometimes deeply sympathetic - he once referred to him as "this poor tired old man." Nevertheless he gives the impression that he regards Mr. Yoshida as a headstrong rather irresponsible "boy" in many respects, who needs looking after. Among the anecdotes he told the other evening was one regarding the occasion immediately after the surrender when Mr. Yoshida had been asked to enter the Cabinet as Foreign Minister. Mr. Ogata had sent his card with a note to Mr. Yoshida at Oiso informing him of his appointment and asking him to bring morning clothes with him to Tokyo for the appointment ceremony. Yoshida brought his morning clothes all right, but he apparently had no black shoes and arrived wearing a scuffed brown pair. At the ceremony before the Emperor Yoshida wore his morning clothes and brown shoes. Of course, as Mr. Ogata said, Mr. Yoshida "had been out of touch with the world for so long." Mr. Ogata also mentioned that the Prime Minister is really "broke," since he squandered his very substantial inheritance while in the diplomatic service - and still seems very proud of the fact. Of course he "does not have to worry," since he has a rich son-in-law.

16. Mr. Ogata said that though he had been acquainted with Mr. Yoshida he never knew him well until after the end of the war. He has indicated that their relationship is still rather formal and distant and that he does not "bother" Mr. Yoshida any more than he has to.

II. Scandals

17. We naturally did not bring up this rather sensitive point and neither did Mr. Ogata. However, his son, Shijuro made several amiable cracks about corruption in the Liberal Party. Mr. Ogata seemed to think this was a huge joke; he shook his finger in mock anger at his son and said, "That boy of mine had better watch himself; he doesn't seem to realize that his father is a very important member of the Government!" Mr. Ogata readily admitted that he had been a frequent visitor at the now infamous Nakagawa geisha restaurant in Akasaka. After all, every important business or political figure in Japan had been to the Nakagawa at one time or another.

XIII. Visit to Takema Machino

18. Takema Machino is a very old man who now lives in retirement at Yugawara (just north of Atami). He is a former Colonel in the Japanese Army who served as adviser to Chang Tso-lin in Manchuria for many years. His name is occasionally mentioned in the Japanese press; he is widely regarded as the successor to the

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late Kazuo Kojima as the Elder Statesman who guides and advises "young men" like Prime Minister Yoshida on high policy matters. As the evening drew to a close Mr. Ogata remarked that he was driving down to Yagawara Sunday to see Machino. He asked if any of us would like to go along for the ride. Unfortunately none of us could go....It may only be a coincidence, but according to the press Prime Minister Yoshida and his lady drove down to Yagawara three weeks ago.

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19. Mr. Ogata has been described as a paradox - an "Oriental" whose life is guided by Oriental principles and virtues and who at the same time is a "Westerner" with considerable experience in Western ways and a wide knowledge of Western culture. The description is ^{surely} an apt one.

20. As will be apparent from this memorandum, I have been very deeply and favorably impressed by Mr. Ogata. He is certainly a gentleman, and a good and kind one. It is easy to understand why he is so highly respected.

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