

## *Original Paper*

# Still Desperate after Pearl Harbor: Investigations of Saburo

## Kurusu after the War of the Pacific

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### **Abstract**

*Saburo Kurusu, an oft-forgotten diplomat who participated in the final three weeks of the U.S.-Japanese negotiations prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, has garnered renewed attention from diplomatic historians in the last several years. Owing to the publication of *The Desperate Diplomat* (Clifford & Okura, 2016), which included an original research article on Kurusu's informal diplomacy along with his own English translation of the crucial parts in his memoir, academics now have a better understanding of his diplomatic efforts to stave off the War of the Pacific. A follow-up article, "The Desperate Diplomat Revisited (Okura, 2016)," presented perspectives from Kurusu's collaborators in his informal diplomacy, an American financier, Barnard M. Baruch, and a Methodist minister, E. Stanley Jones, in support of his innocence. While those two studies are valuable in examining Kurusu's involvement in the final U.S.-Japanese negotiations, they came up short in enlightening academics about what happened to Kurusu after Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945. No studies have revealed Kurusu's struggle after the war to debunk the myth of the deceitful ambassador. Although the International Persecution Section for the Tokyo Trials never indicted him, he was indeed under investigation. This article will seek to fill the gap in research by undertaking multi-archival studies.*

### **Keywords**

*Saburo Kurusu, Pearl Harbor, War of the Pacific, Tokyo Trials, World War II, post-war Japan*

## 1. Introduction

Only three weeks before the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941, the Japanese imperial government dispatched special envoy Saburo Kuruusu to the United States to assist Ambassador Admiral Kichisaburo Nomura in an effort to break the diplomatic standstill plaguing the final U.S.-Japanese negotiations. Because of erroneously translated intercepts of Japanese diplomatic cables and his involvement as the Japanese ambassador to Germany in the signing of the Tripartite Pact with Nazi Germany and Italy, the U.S. negotiators, in particular, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, strongly suspected from the beginning that Kuruusu was masquerading as a peace envoy to divert their attention from Japan's meticulous preparation for war. As if to enhance this suspicion, Ambassadors Nomura and Kuruusu failed, due to clerical errors, to deliver Japan's ultimatum to Hull until after Japan launched its air strike on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, which extensively damaged America's infrastructure and national psyche. The delayed ultimatum became another piece of evidence against Kuruusu and cemented the perception that the "peace envoy" already knew the plan of attack prior to his departure from Japan and that he only pretended to continue diplomatic negotiations to deceive the American policymakers. The "myth of the deceitful ambassador" was born, which made his name synonymous with treachery and a symbol of the Day of Infamy. One argued that "to Kuruusu" is a slang verb "meant to execute, or seek to execute, a very slick piece of treachery" ("Kuruusu Was Surprised," 1945, p. 4). The American media labeled him "a slimy, little skunk" ("Not So Dumb," 1945, p. 6), "Judas envoy" (Hughes, 1952, p. 9), "one of the most hated man in America" (Schwartz, 1945, p. 6), and "admirer of Hitler" (Straight 1941, pp. 721-722), who "would have been lynched" (Howard, 1945, p. 84) if Americans had had the opportunity. Caricaturing Kuruusu continued even though he insisted that the government did not inform him of the plan of attack beforehand and that he was as dumbfounded and devastated by the news of the attack as anyone at home or abroad. He repeated many times that he entered the final negotiations in good faith and made tireless efforts until the last moment to avert military confrontation between the two nations, which was, by then, deemed unavoidable (Kuruusu 1948, 1952). "They [the Japanese government] never told us [Nomura and Kuruusu] the attack on Pearl Harbor was coming while our discussions were going on in Washington" (Huth, 1951, p. 4). He repeated: "My sole motive in undertaking the mission was to try to save peace in the Pacific" ("Kuruusu Denied He Knew Tojo's Plan," 1948, p. 8).

The myth of the deceitful ambassador ruined Kuruusu's reputation as a veteran diplomat with thirty-five years of service and cost him his job prospects and financial stability in post-war Japan, which was crippled by hyperinflation. Despite his plea to Prime Minister Tetsu Katayama for leniency, the new post-war Japanese government under Allied occupation banned Kuruusu from returning to public office in October 1947. According to The United Press (UP), on November 12, 1947, Kuruusu was still optimistic and expressed his hope for aiding the reconstruction of Japan and ameliorating the U.S.-Japanese relations, and he enthusiastically discussed the need for education reform in Japan ("Kuruusu Wants to Emerge from Retirement, Aid Japan's Rebirth," 1945, p. 1). Even after the

government removed both former ambassadors Kurusu and Nomura from the purge list in March 1952, Kurusu was unable to take advantage of the new opportunity to return to public service that he so craved, because strokes that he suffered in 1948 had paralyzed the left side of his body. He distanced himself from politics and spent the remainder of his life in retirement trying to regain his physical mobility (Berlin, 1952, p. 13). Kurusu quietly passed away at the age of 68 in April 1954, survived by his American wife, nee Alice J. Little, who had stayed with him in Japan all through the war, and two daughters, Jaye and Pia, both of whom married American servicemen and eventually immigrated to their mother's home country. An American newspaper sarcastically reported Kurusu's death in an article entitled "Devil His Due" (1954, p. 10). Coincidentally in the same year, Nomura resurfaced in public and won election to the Upper House, thereby redeeming himself as parliamentary member. He was later posthumously awarded Japan's highest Medal of Honor. Unlike the decorated admiral, who enjoyed a long life, Kurusu never had the opportunity to vindicate himself fully in the court of public opinion other than to use his two memoirs in Japanese to publicize his effort to prevent the war between the two nations and to express his frustrations for not being able to shed the spiteful label, "the deceitful ambassador."

Nearly eighty years have passed since Kurusu's fateful mission to the United States, and academics have long exonerated him mostly by directly or indirectly citing from his Japanese memoirs or re-translating the erroneously interpreted pre-war Japanese diplomatic cables. However, existing studies on Kurusu or the final U.S.-Japanese negotiations could not inform scholars much about what happened to Kurusu after the war. They give the erroneous impressions that U.S. policymakers simply stopped blaming the deceitful ambassador after winning the war or that they simply forgave his alleged "misdeeds." To close this gap in the research, this article will concentrate on the process of the investigation by the International Prosecution Section (IPS) of Kurusu for the International Military Tribunal for the Far East about which he said little in his two memoirs. Yoshinobu Higurashi, who authored "Kisojyo seisaku no seiji katei" in *Sengo gaiko no keisei* claimed that the most reliable information for the IPS came from their interrogations of the Japanese and that he used Kurusu as an example of one who provided vast and detailed information about the process of the Japanese-U.S. negotiation (1994, p. 39). Higurashi did not substantiate his claim in the article or give any further information about it in his other works on the trials (2002), and subsequent seminal works by others on the Tokyo Trials, such as Kentaro Awaya (2006), R. John Pritchard (1998), and Neil Boister and Robert Cryer (2008), did not mention it at all. Similarly, a U.P. article in *The New York Times* reported on May 26, 1946 that Kurusu "supplied valuable data," but there were no follow-ups to substantiate its story ("Kurusu Reported Informing Allies," 1946, p. 5). Did Kurusu actually reveal anything more than what the IPS had already discovered by then about the signing of the Tripartite Pact in 1940 or the U.S.-Japanese negotiations in 1941? Were there any bombshell revelations that changed the course of the IPS investigations or the prosecution of the defendants? This article will utilize Kurusu's two memoirs, *Homatsu no Sanjugo nen* (1948), and *Nichibei kosho hiwa* (1952), the Kurusu Collection

(Kurusu Saburo kaneki bunsho at the National Diet Library (NDL)) in Japan, and the International Military Tribunal for the Far East collection at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in the United States.

## 2. Post Pearl Harbor

After a short internment in Hot Springs, Virginia, and then in Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, Kurusu, as well as other Japanese diplomats, finally returned to Japan on board an exchange ship in February 1942. During the war, he devotedly performed his patriotic duties and gave a series of speeches to support Japan's war efforts, which were translated into English and compiled into a book (Kurusu, 1944). Kurusu and his family moved to their modest six-room cottage in Karuizawa after a B-29 incinerated their Tokyo residence during the American air-raid in 1942. A navigation/engineer officer in the Imperial Army, Ryo, Alice and Saburo's only son, who looked more American than Japanese, was killed in action in February, 1945, although his ultimate demise was shrouded in mystery. On August 15, 1945 (JST), only six months after Ryo's death, Emperor Hirohito accepted the terms of the unconditional surrender and promulgated the Surrender Proclamation, which put Japan under foreign occupation for the first time in its long history.

The first American transport, C-46, part of the advanced party commanded by Colonel Charles P. Tench, landed at the Atsugi airfield, approximately 70 miles away from Tokyo, on August 28, 1945, to prepare for the landing of the main airborne force scheduled in two days. Representing Japan, Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu, who was later indicted for war crimes, signed the Japanese Instrument of Surrender on the deck of the American battleship, *USS Missouri*, on September 2 to end the war formally. General Douglas MacArthur, whom President Harry Truman had appointed as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), arrived in Japan on August 29, countersigned the document and proceeded to oversee the occupation of Japan, which lasted until the San Francisco Peace Treaty took effect in 1952.

Upon the instruction from the U.S. State War Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), which gave him the power to appoint a special international military court, on January 19, 1946, MacArthur promulgated the enabling charter, which established the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE). In March 1946, the Far Eastern Commission, which was comprised of eleven nations involved in the war in the Pacific and East Asia (USA, Canada, USSR, UK, China, France, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, India and the Philippines), sanctioned the charter and the establishment of the tribunal.

On September 11, 1945 (JST), MacArthur ordered the arrest of former Prime Minister General Hideki Tojo and sent soldiers without any prior notification to him. In response, Tojo attempted suicide by gunshot. Thirty-nine Class A criminals—former ministers, ambassadors, and military generals—were arrested on the same day, including former German special envoy-turned ambassador Heinrich Stahmer, who engaged in the preparatory negotiations with then Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka to conclude

the Tripartite Pact. Eleven additional suspects were arrested on November 19, fifty-nine on December 2, and the final round of nine arrests occurred on December 6. Although Emperor Hirohito was spared, one of the most senior members of the imperial household, Prince Morimasa Nashimoto, the Marshal-General on the Imperial Army, was on the list, which shocked the young and old into writing letters to the Allied General Headquarters detailing his high character traits and asking for leniency and release from the Sugamo Prison. Former Prime Minister, Fumimaro Konoye, the bluest of the blue-blooded aristocrats, who formed a cabinet three times at pivotal moments before the war and had already been interviewed by the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) in November, killed himself rather than endure humiliation: "I have been most gravely concerned by the fact that I have committed certain errors in the handling of state affairs since the outbreak of the China Incident. I cannot, however, stand the humiliation of being apprehended and tried by an American court" (Crane, 1945, p. 2). The Allied Powers designed to classify war criminals in three different categories: "Class A charges alleging 'crimes against peace' were to be brought against Japan's top leaders, who had planned and directed the war. Class B and C charges, which could be leveled at Japanese of any rank, covered 'conventional war crimes' and 'crimes against humanity,' respectively."

Even though Kurusu was not arrested, his investigation was underway. In a cable to the General Headquarters in Tokyo dated on September 27, 1946, Washington suggested taking action, if deemed appropriate, to apprehend an additional nine war criminal suspects, which included both Kurusu and Nomura. The biographical report of Kurusu on November 6, 1945, prepared by the Research and Analysis Branch in the Department of State, listed his diplomatic appointments in chronological order and revealed Kurusu's pro-American position, which matched his personal statements to American journalists after the war:

"According to source, he was outspoken in his criticism of Japan's militaristic policies. Source continues that in Manila too, he identified himself with Americans and American interests (IPS, 1945, p. 2).

"According to source it was expected, when World War II started, that KURUSU would be appointed Ambassador to the United States, because of his commercial experience and 'pro-American' tendencies, which, some thought, would be exceptionally valuable in helping to avert the crises that the new world situation was about to create. Instead he was appointed Ambassador to Germany" (p. 2).

"According to source, KURUSU is not an outstanding personality in the Foreign Service, perhaps because his personal views have always been subordinated to his professional duties... Source continues that KURUSU is reported to have been personally opposed to the Three Power Pact. Yet he stayed on to sign this agreement in September 1940, although negotiations had been initiated by OSHIMA and pushed through by Foreign Minister MATSUOKA in Tokyo. Several sources state that KURUSU was not regarded as being especially friendly towards the Axis" (p. 2).

“One source stated that both his command of English and his American wife have proved somewhat of a handicap to his career in the Foreign Office, as he has been regarded by some Japanese as being too friendly towards Americans” (p. 7).

To counterbalance, the report also listed unfavorable opinions held by policymakers at the time of his arrival in Washington: “One natural observer characterized KURUSU’s mission as ‘a gigantic blackmail plot’ by Hitler against the United States” (p. 3).

The most important statement in the analysis is that, “[a]ccording to one source, Washington was unable to decide whether KURUSU had double-crossed the United States government or had been double-crossed by his own” (p. 5). In its summary, the report concluded: “Available information is insufficient to conclude whether or not KURUSU knew of the plans of his government to attack the United States, when he came to Washington” (p. 7).

On November 30, 1945, President Truman appointed his assistant attorney general of the criminal division in the Justice Department, Joseph B. Keenan, who was instrumental in prosecuting depression-era gangsters, the chief prosecutor for the upcoming trial in Japan despite the fact that he had no prior work experience in Far Eastern affairs, and his knowledge in the area was suspect at best. Keenan arrived in Japan on December 6, 1946, the same day the warrants of arrest were issued to the Emperor’s confidant, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, Marques Koichi Kido, who later voluntarily submitted his detailed personal diaries, which were among the most valuable information about Japan’s decision-making behind every major political move. Alan Mansfield (Australia), Henry Nolan (Canada), Hsiang Che-chun (China), Robert L. Onto (France), P. Govinda Menon (India), W. G. Frederick Borgerhoff-Mulder (Netherlands), Ronald H. Quilliam (New Zealand), Pedro Lopez (Philippines), Arthur S. Comyns Carr (UK) and Sergei A. Golunsky (USSR) joined the IPS as associate prosecutors.

Kurusu did not wait long before he tried to vindicate himself. He responded to reporters and insisted that he had no prior knowledge of the Pearl Harbor attack. The Associated Press reported that, on September 6, 1945, only three weeks after the end of the war, Frederick C. Opper, a radio correspondent from the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), interviewed Kurusu in Karuizawa. He quoted Kurusu as saying that “he was deeply hurt by the American accusation that he was bait for the trap” (“Unaware of Blow at Hawaii,” 1945, p. 3). Inserting some racial slurs casually, The International News Service (INS) quoted Kurusu as saying that “he did not know that the Jap fleet attack was planned—that he was an unhappy tool of Jap Premier Hideki Tojo” and that “he was as ignorant of Tokyo’s intentions as the American people were” (“Japan ‘Peace’ Delegate Puts Blame on Tojo,” 1945 p. 6). Western media had a keen interest in giving due punishment to the man whom they firmly believed deceived the U.S. and asked Keenan about his possible indictment. Responding to an AP reporter on December 10, 1945, he laid out his principle: “The visit of Kurusu and Nomura to the United States and all incidents thereto will be very carefully scrutinized” (“M’Aurther” to Seize 57 More Japanese,” 1945, p. 3).

A subsequent record on Kurusu is Keenan's memorandum dated January 11, 1946 to Lt. Colonel B. Edwin Sackett (Special Investigative Unit, SCAP's Legal Section), in which he asked Sackett to ask General Elliot R. Thorpe (Chief of Counterintelligence) if there was any reason why Kurusu should not be interrogated or incarcerated (IPS Numerical Record Case File, 1945). In response, the next day, D. L. Waldorf in the Counter Intelligence Section informed Keenan:

General Thorpe stated emphatically that he was strongly against the arrest of Saburo KURUSU and that he further would consider it necessary to oppose any such action. However, General Thorpe indicated that if this Section so desired, he would be happy to extend an invitation to Mr. KURUSU to come to Tokyo as a guest of this Government and remain as long as this Section deemed it necessary. In this manner, Mr. KURUSU would be conveniently available at any time for interrogation or conference by members of the Section (Letter to Keenan).

Waldorf also passed General Thorpe's personal perspectives to Keenan: "General Thorpe stated that his office had conducted an intensive and exhaustive investigation regarding the activity of both Saburo KURUSU and Admiral NOMURA and felt that both of these individuals were innocent of any crime against the United States" (p. 1). The letter also stated that Thorpe would be happy to send his officers to both former ambassadors to extend an invitation to remain in Tokyo if requested officially (p. 2).

Kurusu's name appeared in evidentiary documents as the "person implicated" from February to June 1946 with regard to the "preparation for war," "violation of treaties," "conspiracy for aggressive warfare," "expansion," his involvement in the "Tripartite Pact," "affairs with China," "aggression in French Indochina," "relations with U.S. (attack on Pearl Harbor)," and "conspiracy for and preparation of aggressive warfare (Relations with Germany, France, Netherlands East Indies)" (IPS, 1946).

The NARA indexed what seemed to be the first direct interrogation of Kurusu by the Allied Powers, which read: "Mr. Keenans [sic] interview of Admiral Ofstie who had previously interviewed Kurusu/Not much information; just a note of" (1945). The index leads only to an unsigned memorandum dated December 13, 1945 that reads: "He [Admiral Ralph Andrew Ofstie] said he has interviewed Nagano, Nomura and Poruso. The name of the last individual had apparently a typographical error and was crossed out with a semi-legible hand-written correction that may or may not read Kurusu (IPS, 1945). The memorandum did not detail any interrogations with either Nagano or the third person in the letter, which the index suggests was Kurusu, even though the memorandum briefed Nomura's earnest wish to avert the war ("Notes of Talk with Admiral Ofstie"). Likewise, the only index on Kurusu in the USSBS to which Admiral Ofstie belonged is unrelated to what the first index suggests. Ofstie indeed met Nomura, and the record of their meeting exists. Yet, the only Kurusu record in the USSBS is a copy of the "snitching" from a provincial governor to the Interior Minister reporting Kurusu's visit to a local police station seven days after the Surrender Proclamation to shed some light on future U.S. foreign policy (Y. Otsubo personal correspondence, August 24, 1945). Aside from this, there is no record of Ofstie's interview with Kurusu in the USSBS. Given the discrepancies,

two possibilities emerge. First, the name with a typographical correction may not actually refer to Kurusu, although the document is indexed under his name. The second possibility is that the interview between Kurusu and Ofstie did take place, but detailed records were lost or never existed.

Keenan did meet Kurusu eventually in February of 1946. However, the details of the interview were lost, as Keenan did not use a stenographer, and no written records exist except for a short discussion in one of Kurusu's memoirs and Keenan's brief memorandum expressing his personal impression of Kurusu. According to Kurusu, the two were confused about the discrepancies between the Japanese diplomatic cables and their American intercepts translated into English. Kurusu returned the next day to deliver the English translations of the cables done by a Foreign Ministry staffer and compared with the American intercepts. Keenan noticed the mistranslations and said that he would notify Washington to have the errors corrected (Kurusu, 1948, p. 76), which gave Kurusu a positive impression of Keenan. This is the only mention in Kurusu's memoir about the nature of their meeting. On the other hand, Keenan was not pleased with how the interview went and believed that Kurusu was unwilling to tell what he actually knew. "I consider him evasive and quite unsatisfactory" ("Conference with Kurusu," 1946). Criticizing the "kid glove treatment" that Kurusu had received, Keenan recorded "... that at least some of these individuals on the fringes have been too softly and politely interrogated and have taken a great deal for granted that they have nothing to fear, and that if he [Kurusu] had received what he thought were any assurances that he would not be named as a defendant, he could not rely upon the same."

However, the Associated Press already reported on February 11, 1946, only a few days before Keenan wrote that memorandum, that the Allied Powers may not prosecute either Kurusu or Nomura and that, if so, there would be an announcement later ("Kurusu, Nomura May Escape from Prosecutions for War Crimes," 1946, p. 2). This report may be related to the fact that the United States, Australia and Great Britain had already submitted their tentative lists of war crime suspects, and that, on February 6, Keenan's assistant, John W. Brabner-Smith, introduced the lists to prosecutors from the British Commonwealth. None included Kurusu. From the beginning, the IPS intended to keep the number of defendants manageable. The IPS staff also discussed at a meeting that they would focus on those high ranking individuals, such as the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Navy, ministers (War, and Navy), prime ministers, and the President of the Privy Council, who "would be the group of people who would be top people in government for acts of government in all phases ("Notes on Staff Meeting," 1945). Kurusu did not exactly match the definition of top government officials, and he was not part of the decision-making process to determine the course of the military or the diplomatic actions, including the signing of treaties and continuation of the U.S.-Japanese negotiations. The memorandum suggests that Kurusu irritated and frustrated temperamental Keenan at the meeting, but most likely Keenan knew it would be difficult to indict Kurusu at least for the first round of the trial. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that Kurusu was used as a witness to squeeze for even more information about the decision-making process prior to the Pearl Harbor attack to be used against prospective defendants or



to countercheck their testimony.

Based on the information they collected, the Evidence and Defense Committee in the IPS narrowed the list to the key defendants to be submitted to the Executive Committee, which reviewed the list and made a final decision on each defendant. At the beginning of the first meeting on March 11, 1946, the IPS selected, by a majority, three suspects to be officially indicted, which included Tojo and Togo both of whom were deeply involved in sending Kurusu to Washington three weeks before the Pearl Harbor attack. The same day, the Executive Committee officially charged Yosuke Matsuoka, who was instrumental in bringing Germany and Japan together to form the Tripartite Pact that Kurusu signed on behalf of Japan. Keenan submitted the final list to MacArthur on April 13, 1946 for approval, however, the Soviet prosecutor Golunsky, who arrived in Japan late, insisted on adding five more defendants, two of whom were eventually added to the list.

The Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal finally convened on May 3, 1946. The President of the Tribunal was Justice Sir William F. Webb of Australia, who previously presided over the Australian Commission on Japanese War Crimes and investigated war crimes committed in Papua New Guinea. He led ten associate justices: Edward S. McDougall (Canada), Ju-Ao Mei (China), Henri Bernard (France), Radhabinod Pal (India), William Donald Patrick (UK), Bernad V. A. Rđing. (Netherlands), Erima H. Northcroft (New Zealand), Delfin Jarannila (Philippines), Ivan M. Zaryanov (USSR), and John P. Higgins, who was later replaced by Myron C. Crammer (both US). The Tokyo Trials were an exhausting process. Before they ended in November, 1948, the judges reviewed 5,184 pages of exhibits and the testimony of 1,194 individuals. The prosecution team took 160 days to present its case (June 3, 1946 to January 24, 1947), and the defense took 187 days (February 4, 1947 to April 16, 1948). A total of 176 attorneys (the defense and the prosecution combined) worked on the case with 1,126 personnel contributing, and the mounting court transcript reached 48,288 pages to cover 417 court days (Bix, Awaya & Toyoda, 2000, pp. 320-322, p. 324). The IPS charged the twenty-eight defendants for allegedly committing murder and other conventional war crimes, crimes against peace and crimes against humanity.

Appropriately three weeks after the trial began, the UP reported that “Saburo Kurusu, special envoy to Washington at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, loosened up and supplied that prosecution with much valuable data after being informed that some of the papers were in Allied hands (“Japan’s Secret Documents to Be Turned against Tojo,” 1946 p. 1). Another article the next day added: “Until it became known the secret papers had been found, Kurusu hadn’t said anything. Now he probably hoped to gain favor with the United States” (“No Use Denying,” 1946, p. 6). These reports could have any number of meanings, but they could also refer to the episode in which Kurusu and Keenan compared the original version of the Japanese cables with the American version of the intercepted and decoded messages. As to the accuracy of the reports, other than the UP report and articles in local newspapers based on them, there were no follow-up reports by the AP, the INS or any other newspaper companies about the exact nature of the secret documents that the Allies found or the data that Kurusu was said to

have provided. As a matter of fact, the AP seemed to have refuted the UP report the next day on May 27, stating that Kurusu would be a witness against Tojo and others, but Keenan “was not aware of any startling new evidence or documents that Kurusu might introduce in the trials” (“Saburo Kurusu To Be Witness Against Tojo,” 1946, p. 7). An intensive search at the NARA was not able to substantiate the UP story or to yield any proof that Kurusu and Keenan met again between their first interview in February and the UP report in May. At a press conference while he was making a sudden visit to Washington in June in preparation for the trial, Keenan also took the time to announce that “Mr. Kurusu is being exempted as a war criminal and will be a witness for the United States” (“No to Hirohito Trial, Says Keenan,” 1946, p. 1).

As Keenan believed, Kurusu was still a valuable witness against those indicted. On September 26, Keenan interrogated Kurusu in Karuizawa, approximately 90 miles northwest of Tokyo, in the presence of a stenographer. The record of the questioning totaled 212 pages, although four pages were missing, which suggests that it was a grueling process. The first session began at 12:30 and ended at 15:30, and the second session began at 19:25 and lasted until 23:30. Keenan focused on Japan’s decision-making process behind two political moves that he deemed threatening to American national security and interests prior to the war: Kurusu’s involvement in the signing of the Tripartite Pact as ambassador to Germany mostly in the first session, and his involvement in the final U.S.-Japanese negotiations as a special envoy in the second session. Unlike the first interview in February, Keenan did not leave any memorandum this time to reveal his personal feelings toward Kurusu or his assessment of the validity of Kurusu’s statements.

With respect to the Tripartite Pact, Kurusu’s revelation is consistent with what he wrote in his memoirs: 1) Kurusu did not support the three-power pact but represented Japan to sign it as any duty-bound ambassador would have done (“Interrogation of Kurusu,” p. 13, 17, 37, 60, pp. 95-96); 2) Former Foreign Minister Matsuoka and German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop via Ambassador Stahmer negotiated the context of the agreement, and Kurusu had nothing to do with the process (pp. 55-57); 3) he was reluctant to accept the ambassadorial position and rejected then Foreign Minister Nomura’s plea twice until finally accepting it (p. 16); 4) although he never turned down any diplomatic assignments before, Kurusu did not want to engage in something that went against his ideals, i.e., the pact (p. 16); 5) he also believed that easing the tension between Japan and the United States should have had a higher priority than strengthening the relations with Germany (p. 24, 74); 6) the government did not notify him whether there was any secret clause in the Tripartite Pact about Japan automatically joining the war if the United States attacked Germany or about potential German-Japan joint military operations (p. 66, 93, pp. 101-103, 136); 7) he was aware that the United States would consider the pact as a threat to its national security (pp. 55-57); 8) looking back, he believed that the tree-nation alliance was a diplomatic error on Japan’s side (p. 13, 94); and 9) he resigned from the post, as he was unable to support the government’s policy in good conscience (p. 63, pp. 120-122).

Kurusu repeatedly stated that Matsuoka was the architect of the pact and that Kurusu was only a peripheral figure in the grand scheme of things, which is historically accurate. Making an alliance with Nazi Germany and antagonizing the United States were contrary to what he said he believed in. As a diplomat, he believed that “[t]hreatening is the worst policy in diplomacy” (p. 24). By the time Keenan conducted the interview in September, the IPS had already collected sufficient information for the Tripartite stage of the trial; the IPS had interviewed Matsuoka (Class A war criminal) before he died from tuberculosis in prison in June 1946 and Kurusu’s immediate predecessor, Ambassador to Nazi Germany Hiroshi Oshima (Class A war criminal). Kurusu’s German counterparts, Ribbentrop, was still alive and in American custody, while special envoy Stahmer was awaiting his fate in Sugamo Prison in Tokyo after his arrest. Keenan did not show particular interest and asked only a few follow-up questions, when Kurusu said that a foreign office liaison visited Kurusu two months before the war ended to make records of all of the diplomats who had engaged in the Tripartite Pact and that a copy of the records was saved in the Foreign Ministry (p. 34). Kurusu did implicate Matsuoka in the interview, but he made no bombshell revelations that would have changed the course of the trial. Matsuoka had already been implicated, but he had died in prison by the time of Kurusu’s second interview. Keenan was still suspicious about whether there was a secret clause in the Tripartite Pact, but Kurusu was not able to reveal something that never existed.

During the second session in the evening of September 26, Keenan asked Kurusu mostly about his involvement in the final U.S.-Japanese negotiations in chronological order starting with his hurried trip to Washington after his meeting with Togo. Just as Kurusu was concerned before going to Washington, Keenan pointed out that Kurusu was not an appropriate person to play the role of the peace envoy, as he was involved in the Tripartite Pact. Kurusu responded to Keenan’s major questions: 1) there was no hidden agenda in his hurried dispatch to Washington prior to the Pearl Harbor attack (p. 142, pp. 145-146); 2) the U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Joseph C. Grew, knew that Kurusu was merely going to the United States to leave no stones unturned rather than taking with him any new ideas; 3) Tojo told him that the negotiations were very difficult and that their failure could be the end of diplomatic negotiations (p. 131, pp. 156-157); 4) Kurusu knew that he was not necessarily an appropriate person to go to the United States, as his involvement in the signing of the Tripartite Pact could cast a dark shadow over the negotiations (p. 144); 5) he was not instructed to give his American counterparts the absolute deadline to conclude the negotiations, although Togo strictly instructed him to conclude the negotiation by the end of November (p. 167, 176); 6) he was not aware of the movement of the Japanese troops immediately before the Pearl Harbor attack (p. 149, 154); 7) Kurusu did not feel that the Hull Note was equivalent to an ultimatum to Japan (p. 197); 8) clerical errors in decoding and typing prevented him from reading the final cable from Japan the morning of December 7, and he could not predict whether the delay in submitting to Hull would violate the Geneva Convention on the declaration of war (pp. 209-210, 212); and most important of all, 9) the government did not instruct Nomura and Kurusu to delay the meeting with Hull, and they did not have any evil intention in giving

Hull Japan's final communication after it had attacked Pearl Harbor (pp. 202-212).

Kurusu did not disclose during the interview his side-door diplomacy with Barnard M. Baruch, which he did only in his second memoir. Even though Revland Stanley Jones had already come forward and talked to reporters about his involvement in the last-minute informal diplomacy several months before Keenan's interview of the former peace envoy, Kurusu did not mention Jones' name. Kurusu referred to him only as "one Christian minister (p. 200)". Kurusu emphasized that, since he did know the movement of the troops, he could not have intentionally deceived the United States into believing that there was a chance for a peaceful settlement. Rather, he did believe in the power of diplomacy and striving for a diplomatic breakthrough:

It is my belief—diplomats of my country believe that, if the situation is bad and it cannot be saved immediately, even to put it off for a little while might save the situation. You can never tell what kind of break comes in next day or in a month. Suppose we made some agreement, even for three months or four months; what would happen in Europe? What would that be in the development of warfare between Soviet Russia and Germany? Our soldiers might have second thought of that. Almost anything can happen. So, if you break the relation off, well, that is the finish. But, so long as things are still living, there might be a chance.

The greatest mystery remains, however. Kurusu made no mention at all of this meeting in September in his two memoirs published in 1948 and 1954 respectively. Kurusu finished the draft of the 1948 version around the end of 1945, started revising it about a year later and was still editing it at least for some time after July 7, 1947, as he referred in the preface of a letter to an American intermediary dated that day (Kurusu, 1948, pp. 10-12). Kurusu finished his second memoir in July 1952, after a stroke partially paralyzed him in August 1948, and he stated that he was then able to discuss what he was not able to reveal or to partially identify those whom he did not mention in his first version (Kurusu, 1952, pp. 1-2). Yet, his silence is in stark contrast to his first encounter with Keenan in February, which he revealed in his second memoir with respect to the mistranslated cables. Several possibilities arise. First, perhaps on his own accord, he kept the second meeting with Keenan in September confidential even after the war for fear of future repercussions and retaliations. The clash between Togo and Shimada in court on December 15, 1946 is noteworthy. Togo testified in court that Navy Minister Shigetaro Shimada threatened him in prison not to disclose the Navy's initial idea to commence hostilities without first declaring war (Hagiwara, 2008, p. 535). It may have crossed Kurusu's mind as well that former military men or anybody for that matter could attack him, if they misunderstood that Kurusu disclosed an "inconvenient truth" to the IPS and "betrayed" the nation. Secondly, before their interviews, the IPS might have ordered Kurusu not to reveal what was discussed. It is customary for those involved in court cases not to disclose anything court-related, because their statements may be used against them. Thirdly, Kurusu may have felt that the meeting was not relevant or significant enough to discuss in his memoirs. After all, he did not incriminate anybody new or give the IPS any eye-opening revelations that they may or may not have expected of him. At this point, there is no

evidence in existing documents that rules out any of these hypotheses.

Who emerged as a victor from the seven-hour interrogation? Who won? It seems that Kurusu executed very well his objectives to portray himself as an “irrelevant,” “non-decision maker,” which he really was, whose patriotism drove him to take on the challenging assignments that happened to appear threatening to American security—signing the Tripartite Pact and serving as special envoy to the United States—despite his personal reservations about supporting the government’s policies. Best of all, he did not give away anything new to further implicate himself with regard to aggressive warfare or crimes against peace. Furthermore, He did not implicate anybody not previously exposed or provide the IPS with any untold stories about his former colleagues, such as Nomura, Togo or Tojo, or his involvement in the signing of the Tripartite Pact and the U.S.-Japanese negotiations.

In addition to Kurusu’s curious silence about the meeting in his memoirs, another great mystery is Keenan’s master game plan. What new information did Keenan intend to squeeze out of Kurusu? Nothing out of the ordinary stood out from the interrogation. Perhaps Keenan had hoped to obtain evidence that there was indeed a secret clause in the Pact and that Kurusu also knew the plan of the Pearl Harbor attack beforehand but feigned interest in continuing the final negotiations with the United States. Yet, Keenan gained practically nothing new: the hastily drafted Tripartite Pact did not contain a so-called secret clause that gave proportionate benefits to Japan vis-à-vis Germany and Italy, as the United States suspected. The IPS could have easily substantiated Kurusu’s side of the story, as the Allied had already interrogated both Ribbentrop, who was in jail, and Stahmer about the true nature of the Tripartite Pact. With respect to the final U.S.-Japanese negotiations, former U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Joseph C. Grew, and Reverend Stanley Jones, Kurusu’s partner in the side-door diplomacy, expressed their support stating that Kurusu aimed to preserve the peace. Grew wrote a letter to Kurusu after the war, in which he stated that Kurusu was doing his best to preserve the peace, which he expressed in his many public speeches (August, 13, 1946). Jones openly discussed his involvement in the side-door diplomacy with reporters in November, 1946, and published an article in which he expressed his unwavering support for Kurusu’s sincere effort to avert the war (“Identified as Mediator,” 1945, p. 4; Jones 1945, p. 610, 612). Judging from the sequence of questions and responses, it is nearly impossible to assume that the missing four pages of the Keenan-Kurusu interrogation contained “bombshell revelations” to implicate him or any others not yet indicted. As Keenan did not leave any memorandum on the objective of his meeting with Kurusu of that day or on his personal feelings about the interview, as he did regarding the first meeting in February, no one will ever know with certainty why Keenan invited Kurusu again in September of 1946 after his first interview seven months before.

The most likely explanation is that Keenan sought to use Kurusu one more time to verify the testimonies given by Oshima, Togo and Tojo among others, when the trial reached the examination of the Tripartite Pact stage on September 19, and for the final preparation for the upcoming examination of the U.S.-Japanese negotiations stage from November of the same year. Kurusu talked much, as

Higurashi claimed in his aforementioned article in 1994 (p. 39), but his seven-hour interrogation indicates that he volunteered to reveal little. Kurusu was on the list of witnesses requested by Tojo; however, he was not called to testify in court. In his memoirs, Kurusu revealed to Baruch in July 1947 that the IPS had already questioned him “several” times (Kurusu, 1948, p. 11), although he did not disclose exactly how many times. Intensive research of the IMTFE collection in the NARA or in the NDL did not yield any further record indicating that Kurusu had additional formal interviews with Keenan or any other members of the IPS for that matter.

The IMTFE finally adjourned on November 12, 1948. Former Prime Minister Hideki Tojo was sentenced to death by hanging, and his foreign minister Shigenori Togo received a sentence of life in prison, but he died of cholecystitis less than two years after the verdict. Among the 25 defendants, none were acquitted, seven were sentenced to death, and the rest received various prison terms. The Allied Council for Japan, led by MacArthur, reviewed and formally confirmed the verdicts on November 24, 1948, which sealed the fates of the war criminals. Within a month, the seven condemned marched to the gallows.

Still, negative perceptions toward Kurusu were nearly ubiquitous at that time among the Allied occupation authority and those involved in the final U.S.-Japanese negotiations. President of the Tribunal, Chief Justice Webb, named Kurusu in the judgment and accused him of wrongdoing, even though he did not stand trial: “He was advised that the attack was imminent and that he was expected to keep the negotiations going at all costs, in effect, that the appearance of continued negotiations was to be maintained although ‘the date set ... has come and gone’. The United States was to be prevented from becoming unduly suspicious” (Pritchard & Zaide, 1981, p. 49567). Despite the fact that the IPS was not able to collect clear evidence to indicate that the Japanese government informed Kurusu of the plan of attack beforehand or ordered him to feign interest in continuing the negotiations, Webb firmly believed that these were established facts. With regard to Kurusu’s involvement in the Axis Pact, Webb merely mentioned Kurusu’s activities and communications with the Ministry during his mission to Germany and refrained from touching on his legal accountability. Webb’s judgment reignited the media’s curiosity about Kurusu. A news report on November 12, the day after Chief Justice Webb read the verdict, implied that Kurusu was still a person of interest. “It is well known here that a number of authoritative persons in the occupation believed Kurusu should be tried but were overruled.” “Though Kurusu’s attempt to have himself relieved from the Allied purges so he could re-enter Japanese politics recently was disapproved. Both Japanese and Americans find that it will now be interesting to learn whether the occupation authorities heed the court’s findings and order Kurusu’s arrest or whether his previous immunity will continue to apply” (Parrott, 1948, p. E5).

### 3. Conclusion

Kurusu's fear of potential prosecution lingered long, perhaps because Webb accused him of wrongdoing, or because he had already been found guilty in the court of public opinion in the United States in absentia and expected due punishment as one of the most hated men in America. In the alternative, perhaps it was simply because he believed Keenan's bluffing in the first interview in February of 1946 that the IPS might indict Kurusu later. Even though Keenan announced to reporters in 1946 that the Allied would not indict Kurusu, and even though Kurusu was surely aware that he did not quite fit the definition of the Class A war criminal, he was still uneasy. Keenan or MacArthur could have taken a populist approach and asserted any charge against Kurusu, if not for war crimes, just to score political points with the still unforgiving general public back home. After all, Japan was under occupation, and Americans had not forgotten the misdeed of the treacherous ambassador. Unaware of the IPS's next move, Kurusu needed to explain his dispatch to the United States in that fateful November again and again to defend himself. In an interview with the AP in December 1951, the ten-year anniversary of the day of infamy, he reiterated his side of the story: "The situation was very critical at that time. War was a possibility. But we saw a chance of mainlining peace. We tried everything possible but our efforts came too late. There were too many ifs. It was a great disappointment to me that our effort failed". He added: "I shall live the rest of my life quietly" (Huth, 1951). He kept his word and never returned to diplomacy again.

Although Yoshinobu Higurashi, the author of "Kisojyo seisaku no weiji katei," and a UP article in the *New York Times* on May 26, 1976 suggested that Kurusu gave vast and previously unknown valuable information about the process of the U.S.-Japanese final negotiations to the IPS, there are no such documents on Kurusu in the National Diet Library in Tokyo or in the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington D.C. supporting such claims. It is more than likely that there were no bombshell revelations that changed the course of the IPS investigations or the prosecution of the Japanese defendants. Kurusu did not reveal anything more than what the IPS had already discovered by then.

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