

JOSEPH GREW

A More Forceful Response to Japan Is Needed (1937)

The American ambassador to Japan during the 1930s was a penetrating thinker and veteran Asian specialist named Joseph Grew. His analysis of the situation in East Asia increasingly differed from that animating the policies of Secretary of State Henry Stimson and his successor, Cordell Hull. In a diary entry in October 1937, Grew recorded his doubts about the effectiveness of moral suasion in blunting Japanese imperialism.

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I have no right, as a representative of the Government, to criticize the Government's policy and actions, but that doesn't make me feel any less sorry about the way things have turned. An architect who has spent five years slowly building what he hoped was going to be a solid and permanent edifice and has then seen that edifice suddenly crumble about his ears might feel similarly. Or a doctor who has worked hard over a patient and then has lost his case. Our country came to a fork in the road and, paradoxical as it may seem to a peace loving nation, chose the fork which leads not

to peace but potentially to war. Our primary and fundamental concept was to avoid involvement in the Far Eastern mess; we have chosen the road which might lead directly to involvement.

If this sudden turnabout in policy could possibly help the situation either now or in the future, if our branding of Japan as an aggressor and our appeal to the Nine Power Treaty and the Kellogg Pact and our support of the League of Nations, could serve to stop the fighting in China or limit its sphere or prevent similar aggression in the future, my accord with this step would be complete

and wholehearted. But, alas, history and experience have shown that Realpolitik and not ethereal idealism should govern our policy and our acts today. With Manchuria, Ethiopia, and Spain written in big letters across the pages of history, how can we ignore the practical experience of those events and the hopelessness of deterring them *unless we are willing to fight*? Moral suasion is ineffective; economic and financial sanctions have been shown to be ineffective and dangerous to boot. Once again I fear that we shall crawl out on a limb—and be left there—to reap the odium and practical disadvantages of our course from which other countries will then hasten to profit. Such is internationalism to-

day. Why, oh why, do we disregard the experience and facts of history which stare us in the face?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did American statesmen oppose the kind of aggressive stance toward Japan that Grew advocated?
2. How might a World War I veteran have responded to Grew's perspective?
3. Why did so many Americans consider domestic concerns more important than foreign ones in the 1930s?