

Japan to France, 19-06-1940

While France was unsuccessfully defending itself against Germany in Europe, the Japanese government and especially its armed forces was bent on expanding its territory in Asia. As part of this expansion, one of the objectives of the government of Japan was to prevent military supplies from reaching China by controlling its sea and land lines of communication.¹ The government of Japan accused France of allowing supplies to enter China overland from French Indochina. Shortly following the French defeat in Europe, the Japanese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Masayuki Tani presented the French Ambassador Charles Arsène-Henry with an ultimatum on June 19, 1940.² The ultimatum demanded that France close its borders to fuel, vehicles and other military equipment being transported to China and assent to the presence of Japanese verification envoys. A reply was demanded within twenty-four hours or else military action would follow.³ The ambassador asked for help from Great Britain and the United States but the former indicated to be unable and the second unwilling to come to France's aid.⁴ The ambassador then advised the French Governor General Catroux in French Indochina to accept the ultimatum and comply with its demands – an advice that the governor general heeded. Shortly thereafter, Catroux was replaced by Admiral Decoux of the Vichy government in France, and Catroux joined the Free French Forces led by General Charles de Gaulle. Nonetheless, French Indo-China closed its borders to military supplies entering China and allowed Japanese envoys to verify its compliance.

¹ Ellen Joy Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955* (Stanford University Press, 1966), 14–15.

² Keesing's, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1940*, Vol. IV:4116. Bussemaker, *Paradise in Peril*, 2001, 529. Toynebee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946: The Initial Triumph of the Axis*, 583.

³ Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*, 17–18; Herman Theodore Bussemaker, *Paradise in Peril: Western Colonial Power and Japanese Expansion in South-East Asia, 1905-1941*, 2001, 529.

⁴ Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina, 1940-1955*, 15–18. Bussemaker, *Paradise in Peril*, 2001, 527-528, 530-531.