

## **The Japanese Surrender and the Division of Korea in 1945: Why Japan Delayed its Surrender Leading to the Division of Korea**

Yông-ho Ch'oe\*

Throughout most of the Pacific War, Japan and the Soviet Union remained neutral. On August 8, 1945, the Soviet Union declared war against Japan, and on August 15, Japan surrendered. The war against Japan was fought almost exclusively by the United States alone. For a mere one week of the war, Russia became a belligerent power and moved into North Korea, forcing the United States to propose the division of Korea. By the end of 1944, the entire Japanese leadership, including the emperor, came to the full realization that Japan lost the war and should seek peace. With the surrender of Germany in early May 1945, even the war-hawks realized their irretrievable defeat. If Japan had reached out to the United States for peace, the war would have ended easily without the Soviet Union entering the war. This, Japan refused to do. Instead, Japan tried to seek out Russian assistance to end the war, in which Japan schemed to drive a wedge between the Soviet Union and the United States. This delayed Japan's surrender, allowing the Soviets to enter into the war, which in turn resulted in the division of Korea.

**Keywords:** Pacific War, Japanese Surrender, Soviet Entry Into War Against Japan, Korean Division, Big Powers Politics for Korean Division

---

\* Yông-ho Ch'oe is a Professor Emeritus, University of Hawaii at Manoa. He can be reached at [choeyh@hawaii.edu](mailto:choeyh@hawaii.edu).

## Introduction

It has been more than seven decades since the Korean Peninsula was divided at the end of the Second World War in 1945. This division has been an unmitigated disaster for Korea and its people. And yet, we still do not know the full story of how and why Korea came to be divided.

This is what we do know. On August 8, 1945, the Soviet Union declared war against Japan, and on the following day, its military troops began to move into the Northeastern corner of Korea. When Japan surrendered on August 15, the Soviet Union was in a position to take over the entire Korean Peninsula militarily, while the United States troops closest to Korea were in Okinawa, some six hundred miles away. Consequently, the United States proposed, and the Soviet Union agreed, to draw the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel as a demarcation line; the Soviet Union would disarm the Japanese troops in the North, while the United States would do the same in the South. This is basically how Korea came to be divided. This, however, is not the whole story. It is only the tip of the iceberg, under which complicated schemes and strategies to end the war were pursued by the three major powers: Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States. In the end, Korea became an innocent victim of the power politics and intrigues waged by the three big powers to meet their geopolitical needs and greed without regard for Korean interests.

What is not commonly acknowledged, however, is that the division of Korea came about as a result of the entry of the Soviet Union into the war against Japan. In April 1941, Japan and the Soviet Union signed a Neutrality Pact, and the two countries scrupulously observed the neutrality during the Pacific War until Russia declared war against Japan just one week before the end of the war. Had Japan surrendered before August 8, there would have been no need for Russian troops to occupy North Korea, and hence no need to divide Korea.

By the end of 1944, most Japanese leaders, including the emperor, realized that Japan had lost the war and peace should be sought. When Germany, Japan's only ally, surrendered in early May 1945, even the most hardcore

of the war hawks realized that the war was irretrievably lost. If Japan had reached out to the United States for peace at this time, the war would have been easily terminated without Russian troops moving into Korea, thus averting its tragic division. But Japan rejected the United States, and instead sought Russian mediation in ending the war. This action delayed the surrender and allowed the Soviet Union to enter the war and advance its troops into Korea, resulting in the Korean partition. What were the reasons for the delay in Japan's surrender?

There are a number of important studies on the ending of the Pacific War,<sup>1</sup> but none deals with the fate of Korea, as far as I can determine. This paper will offer a Korean perspective on why Japan delayed its surrender, enabling the Soviet Union to move into Korea in the last days of the war. One crucial factor that has so far eluded the attention of most scholars is that the Japanese military leadership believed that the Soviet Union and the United States would eventually collide with each other, in which Japan could play the role of power balancer by negotiating with the Soviets. This scheme delayed Japan's surrender resulting in the tragic division of Korea.

## **Realization of Defeat**

Following the defeat at Midway Island in June 1942, Japan suffered continuous military setbacks. In July 1944, the United States gained control of Saipan and the Mariana Islands, and all parts of Japan's main islands were exposed to virtually unlimited bombings by the United States. The situation in Europe was no less grim as Nazi Germany was in full retreat on all fronts.

---

1 In particular, I benefitted from these works: Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Robert J. C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954); Inoue Kiyoshi, *Tennō no sensō sekinin [War Responsibilities of the Emperor]* (Tokyo, 1975); and Yamada Akira and Koketsu Atsushi, *Ososugita seidan: Shōwa tennōno sensō shidō to sensō sekinin [Emperor's decision came too late: the war leadership and the war responsibility of Showa Emperor]* (Tokyo, 1991).

It became clear that Japan, cut off from all supplies and outside resources, had lost the war with no hope of regaining momentum. Such a realization came to most Japanese leaders, including key officers of the Operation Department in the Army Headquarters (Daihōn'ei).

On July 2, 1944, witnessing the fall of Saipan, Colonel Matsutani Makoto, the chief of the Operation Section of the Army Headquarters, along with his staff, Lieutenant Colonel Tanemura Sakō and Major Hashimoto Masakatsu, reassessed the overall war conditions and drafted a new plan anticipating the situation in the spring of 1945. "There is no prospect for the [Japanese] Empire to regain operational momentum hereafter," they concluded, "and, moreover, the situation of Germany is likewise similar to Japan. As the situation will slowly but steadily deteriorate, we must attempt to end the war quickly." The plan then called for peace negotiations, in which the only condition Japan should insist upon is the "protection of the national polity (*kokutai*)."

The Matsutani plan called for dispatching a special envoy to Russia "to build a base for diplomacy with the United States and Great Britain through the Soviet Union." Matsutani first showed his plan to his immediate superior, Major General Masada Jōjirō, the chief of the First Department of Operation, who replied that he agreed in principle but opposed printing the report. Matsutani then presented it to Lieutenant General Hata Hikosaburō, the vice chief of staff, who said that he was not sure it would be a good idea to forward the report to other senior officers and the chief of staff. He then told Matsutani not to divulge the report in view of the importance of the issue. Undeterred, Matsutani explained his plan verbally to other higher officers, including the chief of staff, Tōjō Hideki, who, according to Tanemura, listened with a "bitter facial expression (*kurushii kao o shite*)" and said nothing. But on the following day, Matsutani was dismissed from the Army Headquarters and reassigned to China, with Tanemura succeeding as the new section chief. Apparently, the Matsutani plan displeased senior officials by raising what Tanemura called a "taboo subject of ending the war." This, according to Tanemura, was the first attempt made within the Army Headquarters to bring an end to the war.<sup>2</sup>

---

2 Tanemura Sakō, *Daihōri'ei kimitsu nisshi* [Secret diary of the Army Headquarters] (Tokyo, 1985), 218–20; and Matsutani Makoto, *Daitōa sensō shūshū no shinsō*

The Saipan defeat also emboldened many in the highest political circles, as well as the royal families, to call for peace. Okada Keisuke and Konoe Fumimaro, both former prime ministers, led a campaign to dismiss Tōjō and replace him with a new government that would favor peace. They envisioned a new cabinet headed by a member of the royal family—either Prince Higashikuni or Prince Takamatsu. On June 22, 1944, Konoe met Prince Higashikuni, who expressed his views on removing Tōjō. Higashikuni told Konoe that Tōjō had just sent his secretary to express his wish to resign, whereupon Higashikuni told Tōjō not to resign now—“absolutely not now.” The reason for asking Tōjō to remain in office was so that he could bear all responsibility for the war, allowing the royal family to evade accountability. Higashikuni told Konoe: “It’s of no use anymore (*mō dameda*). We must consider the worst possible situation.” He then said that he was prepared to accept Konoe’s idea of forming a new cabinet headed by either himself (Higashikuni)igas or Prince Takamatsu.<sup>3</sup>

On June 26, Prince Takamatsu, a younger brother of the emperor and a Navy officer serving at the Navy Headquarters, told Hosokawa Morisada, Konoe’s son-in-law and secretary: “The Combined Fleet has been reduced to powerlessness. There is no other way but to sue for peace as soon as possible. Please ask Konoe to exert every effort toward this.”<sup>4</sup>

On July 2, Konoe delivered a letter to Kido Kōichi, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal and the closest advisor of the emperor, which opens with this statement:

Since the battle of Saipan, the Navy authorities have admitted that the Combined Fleet has been reduced to powerlessness, and the Army authorities are also unanimous that the war situation as a whole has absolutely no hope for becoming favorable. In short, inevitable defeat is the conclusion both the Army and the Navy alike have reached, and yet no one has the courage to say it publicly.

---

[True story of terminating the Great East Asian War] (Tokyo, 1980), 79–83.

3 *Konoe Nikki* [Konoe diary] (Tokyo, 1968), 10–11.

4 *Konoe Nikki*, 17–18.

Konoe then urged the emperor to dismiss Tōjō and to form a new cabinet headed by a member of the royal family—preferably Prince Takamatsu. Konoe pleaded with the emperor to issue, with this new cabinet, an imperial decree for an immediate ceasefire.<sup>5</sup>

Kido was basically in agreement with Konoe.<sup>6</sup> On July 8, Konoe met Kido at the latter's office, where Kido expressed his despair over the war, recognizing that "the entire war situation has become nearly all but hopeless (*hotondo zetsubō da*)." Kido, however, feared that Tōjō and his followers might attempt a coup, and suggested that Prince Higashikuni would be a preferable leader of the new cabinet because Prince Takamatsu often argued heatedly (*hijōni kenka serareru*) with the emperor. Kido and Konoe also discussed the emperor's possible abdication, with Kido preferring Higashikuni over Takamatsu as the regent.<sup>7</sup> Konoe also noted in his diary that the emperor himself had reached a point of a near nervous breakdown (*sinkei suijaku*) and was easily irritated (*hijōni kōfun oyabasareru*) as other royal family members pressed for peace.<sup>8</sup> These efforts, however, were in vain. The opposition by the army hardliners was too strong to overcome, and the emperor sided with the army.

### **Koiso and His Supreme War Council Recognized the Defeat**

On July 22, 1944, Tōjō was forced to resign, and General Koiso Kuniaki, the Governor-General of Korea, succeeded him as prime minister. To mollify the peace advocates, Admiral Yonai Mitsumasa was given the post of navy minister in the hope he would act to check the Army, thus creating the Koiso-Yonai Coalition Cabinet.

In his memoir, Koiso wrote that he contemplated the war-situation as he was being brought to Tokyo, and concluded that Japan had lost the war and that he was prepared to say to the emperor that he had no confidence

---

5 *Konoe Nikki*, 32–38.

6 *Konoe Nikki*, 43.

7 *Konoe Nikki*, 48–53.

8 *Konoe Nikki*, 77.

in carrying out the war successfully. But his appointment was made without a chance of explaining the situation.<sup>9</sup> Tanaka Takeo had served as the vice-governor of Korea under Koiso and had just become the chief cabinet secretary of the Koiso cabinet, hence he knew Koiso intimately. According to Tanaka, Koiso came to the realization that “winning the war was extremely difficult,” and hence “believed firmly that it was absolutely necessary to find a way for peace through the Soviet Union or a third country.”<sup>10</sup> Not only Koiso but also key members of his cabinet as well as the majority of his Supreme War Council believed that the war was lost, and peace should be sought.

Known as the most vocal peace advocate within the navy, Yonai Mitsumasa, a former navy minister and the former prime minister, on a June 30<sup>th</sup> gathering of his fellow admirals, voiced his frustration and despair over the war: “Although I do not know the details, the war has been lost. Lost most surely. No matter who takes charge, nothing will work. All an elderly man can do now is to take a nap. Ah!”<sup>11</sup>

Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru was “a confirmed liberal” and worked for peace, according to Kase Toshikazu, who served under him.<sup>12</sup> Shigemitsu presents a rather depressing characterization of Koiso’s leadership: “Unfortunately, Koiso is not the right man as the prime minister, nor is he qualified as a leader. He is no more than a cheerful politician, prone to intrigues... His knowledge and management experiences are foolish, and he lacks spine and common sense. That Koiso was selected as the nation’s highest leader at the critical juncture of the war is an irreparable misfortune for the empire.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Ōdachi Shigeo, the home minister, told Konoe

---

9 Koiso Kuniaki, *Katsuzan kōsō* [Memoir of Koiso Kuniaki] (Tokyo, 1968), 781-85.

10 *Shūsen shiroku* [Record of ending the war], ed. Gaimoshō [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] (Tokyo, 1977), 1: 236-37.

11 Takagi Sōkichi, *Takagi Sōkichi nikki to jōhō*, [Diary and intelligence of Takagi Sokichi] (Tokyo, 2000), 2: 749. Hereafter, *Takagi nikki*.

12 Toshikazu Kase, *Journey to the Missouri* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 68-70.

13 Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Shigemitsu Mamoru shuki* [Writings of Shigemitsu Mamoru] (Tokyo, 1986), 476.

Fumimaro on July 26: "The war has become absolutely hopeless. Moreover, Koiso has no confidence at all. Such a cabinet should fall the sooner the better, and a new cabinet for peace should be formed."<sup>14</sup>

With the fall of his cabinet, Tōjō was forced to relinquish the top army post as well, and General Umezu Yoshijirō, the commander-in-chief-of the Kwantung Army, became the last army chief of staff of the Japanese Imperial Army. When Umezu received a call from Tokyo about his new appointment, he was reluctant to accept it, and consulted with his own vice-chief of staff, Lieutenant General Ikeda Sumihisa. Umezu told Ikeda: "Because I had opposed the war against the United States from the beginning, it is not my wish to assume the position of the chief of staff. Moreover, the war is moving unfavorably for us. After all these times, there is nothing more I can do as the chief of staff, and I do not wish to assume the post. Is there any way I can decline this?" Ikeda replied that Umezu, as a military officer, unlike civil officials, was in no position to refuse, and Umezu agreed. As he left for Tokyo, he told Ikeda: "It is necessary to bring this war to an end as soon as possible, and for this, there is no other way except relying on diplomacy."<sup>15</sup>

Thus, as the Koiso-Yonai cabinet was being launched in July 1944, of the six members—the so-called the Big Six—who constituted the Supreme War Council (Saikō Sensō Shidō Kaigi), the highest war policy decision organ under the emperor,<sup>16</sup> four (Koiso, Yonai, Shigemitsu, and Umezu) believed that the war was lost and peace should be sought as soon as possible. And yet, in spite of their personal beliefs, they continued to wage the war relentlessly and ferociously for another thirteen months, sacrificing millions of innocent lives.

---

14 *Hosokawa nikki, Jōhō tennō ni dassezu; Hosokawa nikki* [Intelligence did not reach the emperor; Diary of Hosokawa Morisada] (Tokyo, 1963), 2: 287 Hereafter, *Hosokawa nikki*.

15 *Shūsen shiroku*, 1: 237.

16 Hattori Takushirō, *Daiheiyō sensō zenshi* [Complete history of the great East Asian war] (Tokyo, 1965), 138-43.



## Emperor Hirohito Wanted Peace

Even the emperor himself considered bringing an end to the war at this time. On September 26, Emperor Hirohito expressed his wish for peace to two of his closet confidants, Kido Kōichi and Shigemitsu Mamoru, which Shigemitsu recorded: "His Majesty asked if it would be possible to make peace on the occasion of Germany's capitulation that would preserve our honor without disarmament or war responsibility. Any disposition of territorial domain would be alright." The emperor then instructed them to keep this talk strictly confidential.<sup>17</sup> But, unfortunately, this idea was not explored any further, though the terms—no disarmament and no war responsibility—would have been unacceptable to the allied powers.

On February 14, 1945, Konoe presented his famous memorial to the emperor, in which he told bluntly: "Defeat, regretfully, has already become inevitable," and Japan should seek peace immediately. Though the defeat would tarnish "the national polity," he said that public opinion in America was not yet willing to alter Japan's "national polity." He then urged the emperor to seek a way to bring an end to the war as soon as possible. Konoe at the same time warned that what Japan should fear more than the defeat itself was a possible Communist revolution that might accompany the social upheaval of the defeat, as he believed the army was infested with potential Communist sympathizers.<sup>18</sup>

After listening carefully, the emperor asked a few questions concerning Konoe's view of the memorial. Umezu Yoshijirō, the army chief of staff, had made a few days earlier on February 9. The emperor told Konoe that Umezu's memorial "is totally opposite to your view," and "according to the Army Headquarters, the American war policy is to destroy the Japanese national polity and it will never be satisfied even after reducing Japan to total ashes."

---

17 Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Saikō sensō shidō kaigi kiroku* [Records of the supreme war council] (Tokyo, 2004), 111–12.

18 *Hosokawa nikki*, 349–54; *Shūsen shiroku*, 2: 42–46; see also Butow, 47–51; and J. W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1979), 259–65.

Thus, "to negotiate peace with America is absolutely unthinkable." The Umezu memorial, according to Konoe's account, then said: "As the Soviet Union, in contrast, harbors goodwill to Japan, even though Japan's homeland may be reduced to ashes, we must continue to fight the United States thoroughly and completely with the assistance of the Soviet Union." To which, Konoe responded: "I think there is no other way but to negotiate peace with America. Even with an unconditional surrender, America would not go so far as to alter the national polity and to do away with the royal family." The emperor replied: "I think so too."<sup>19</sup>

In his important study of the Japanese-American war, Akira Iriye writes: "If the Japanese had approached Washington rather than Moscow in late 1944, they would have found the United States more than ready with a peace plan."<sup>20</sup> Iriye reiterates this for the situation in April and again in June 1945, as he deplores the missed opportunities for bringing an early end to the war.<sup>21</sup>

Surely, if only Japan had reached out to the United States at this time, the war would have been easily terminated without further bloodshed. If the emperor had followed Konoe's advice, with which he fully agreed, there would have been no need to sacrifice millions of innocent lives, including those in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Korea would have been spared the tragic fate of the division. But, alas, Japan rejected the United States, prolonging the war. Why? What were the reasons?

## The Yalta Agreement

The United States wanted badly for the Soviet Union to join the war against Japan from the beginning. In September 1943, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told John R. Deane, the commanding general of the United States Military Mission to Moscow: "Russia's full participation in the war against Japan after the defeat of Germany was essential to the prompt and crushing defeat of

---

<sup>19</sup> *Shūsen shiroku*, 2: 46–49.

<sup>20</sup> Iriye, 225.

<sup>21</sup> Iriye, 242 and 250.

Japan at far less cost to the United States and Great Britain.”<sup>22</sup> Stalin also had a burning desire to fight Japan. In August 1942, Stalin told Averill Harriman, the American ambassador to Moscow, that “Japan was the historic enemy of Russia and that her eventual defeat was essential to Russia’s interests.”<sup>23</sup> Though reluctant at an early stage of the war, Stalin was eager to attack Japan at the time of his choice, with or without American encouragement. But Stalin played his hand carefully to exact maximum advantages for Russia before committing himself to fight Japan.

At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed on the conditions of Russian participation in the war by signing the “Agreement Regarding Entry of the Soviet Union Into the War Against Japan.” The Agreement called for the Soviet Union to enter the war against Japan within two or three months after the German capitulation, with the following conditions: Southern Sakhalin would be returned to Russia; Dairen would be “internationalized” with “the preeminent interests of the Soviet Union in this port being safeguarded”; “the lease of Port Arthur [Lushun] as a naval base of the USSR restored”; “the Chinese-Eastern Railroad and the Southern Manchurian Railroad...shall be jointly operated by the establishment of a joint Soviet-Chinese Company” with “the preeminent interests of the Soviet Union...safeguarded”; and China would retain “full sovereignty in Manchuria.”<sup>24</sup> Space does not permit us to discuss the full implications of this treaty here.

But what is important and relevant to Korea is that, based on the Yalta Agreement, the Soviet Union *had to* enter the war against Japan to acquire the vast interests it was promised. If Russia failed to enter the war before the Japanese capitulation, the terms of the Yalta agreement would not be applied, and the Soviet Union would not be entitled to the Manchurian interests. As late as June 1945, Stalin told Harry Hopkins, the personal envoy of President

---

22 Department of Defense, *Entry of the Soviet Union Into the War Against Japan*, (mimeographed, 1955), 21.

23 John R. Deane, *The Strange Alliance* (New York: Viking Press, 1947), 226.

24 *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945*, 984.

Truman, that "the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan *only if and after* Chiang Kai-shek concurred in the Yalta accord."<sup>25</sup> Therein lies the seed for the territorial division of Korea.

## Did Japan Know About the Yalta Agreement?

The Japanese Foreign Ministry has consistently maintained that it never learned about the Yalta Agreement until after the war.<sup>26</sup> But contrary to this position, it has recently been made clear that information on a key point of the Yalta Agreement—the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan three months after Germany's defeat—did indeed reach the army authorities in Tokyo, but the army concealed it without sharing it with other authorities.

Major General Onodera Makoto, the military attaché at Stockholm, known as a wizard of intelligence, claimed that he learned in February 1945 soon after the Yalta Conference that "the Soviets had secretly agreed to enter the war against Japan three months after the German surrender." Onodera Yuriko, his wife, insisted that she personally encoded the message using a special code that could be used only once, and transmitted it to Hata Hikosaburō, the Army vice chief of staff in Tokyo. The source of this information was Felix Brezeskwinsky, a Polish officer in Stockholm, who obtained it from Poland's government-in-exile in London. Only in 1983 did the Onoderas first learn that Japan did not know of the Yalta Agreement during the war, and they tried in vain to track down what had happened to this vital information they had transmitted. They concluded that either their transmission failed to reach Tokyo or that someone in Tokyo "deliberately concealed" it without sharing it with others.<sup>27</sup> Okabe Noburu of *Sankei Shimbun* made an exhaustive

---

25 Herbert Feis, *Between War and Peace: The Potsdam Conference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 114. (Emphasis added.)

26 *Shūsen shiroku*, 2: 58 and 245.

27 "Yaruta Kyōtei: Soren no dai-Nichi sansen [Yalta agreement: Entry of the Soviet Union into the war]," *Sankei Shimbun*, August 13, 1993, evening edition; and Onodera Yuriko, *Baruto-kai no hotorite* [At the shore of the Baltic Sea] (Tokyo, 1985), 148.

study tracking down the Onodera telegram, and concluded that it reached the Army Headquarters, but someone in the Operation Division willfully quashed it without letting others know—a practice not unusual during the war, according to Okabe.<sup>28</sup>

On August 15, 2012, an NHK special documentary, “Shūsen: Naze hayaku kimerare nakattaka (Ending the war: Why was it not decided sooner?),” was first aired, and Yoshimi Masato, the researcher for the NHK documentary, published his study in the following year, making it abundantly clear that the information regarding the Soviet promise at Yalta to enter the war within three months after German defeat did indeed reach Tokyo from multiple sources, but this vital information was mysteriously covered up. Using the super-secret “ULTRA” files in the British Archives in London, Yoshimi documents that British Intelligence had intercepted multiple telegrams dispatched by Japanese intelligence and diplomatic officials in Europe on the Yalta Agreement and others related to the Russian decision to enter the war. Both NHK and Yoshimi conclude convincingly that information on the Russian promise at Yalta to enter the war against Japan reached the Army authorities in Tokyo, but the Army did not share this vital information with others.<sup>29</sup>

Colonel Hayashi Saburō, the chief of the Russian Section of the Army Headquarters, stated that Japan knew about the Yalta Agreement. In 1974, in his memoir, Hayashi writes: “Our Army Headquarters received immediately after the [Yalta] Conference the information that he [Stalin] promised at the Conference to enter the war against Japan three months after Germany’s surrender.” He continues that “although there was at the time no question that the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan, we had a considerable doubt on the time limit of three months,” because Japan did not believe the Soviets would be capable of starting the war that soon after the German surrender. Hayashi also writes that Japan knew only of the Soviet entry into

---

28 Okabe Noburu, *Kieta Yaruta mitsuyaku kinkyūden* [Disappearance of the urgent telegram on Yala secret agreement] (Tokyo, 2012), 16–85.

29 Yoshimi Masato, *Shūsen-shi: Naze ketsudan dekinattaka* [History of ending the war; Why could they not decide?] (Tokyo, 2013), 33–120.

the war and did not know about the terms of the Agreement, which he learned only after the war.<sup>30</sup> Hayashi does not tell us the source of this information or how he had obtained it.

## The Soviet Union Prepares for War against Japan

From February 1945, Japan witnessed the massive buildup of Soviet military power in Siberia. Lieutenant Colonel Sejima Ryūzō of the Operation Division was dispatched to Moscow as a diplomatic courier, leaving Tokyo on December 25, 1944, and returning in early February. On the Trans-Siberian Railroad, which took two weeks to cross one way, he observed a train after train loaded with Russian troops, tanks, and equipment being shifted eastward.<sup>31</sup> In late February 1945, Army Headquarters in Tokyo confirmed a marked increase in the shifting of Russian troops on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, including anti-aircraft guns and airplanes. The number of trains actually observed from late February to early August was between 800 and 1,000.<sup>32</sup> On July 26, Colonel Shiroki Suenari, the new chief of the Russian Section of the Army Headquarters, reported that the Soviets had completed transporting 1.5 million troops, 5,400 airplanes, and 3,000 tanks to the Far East.<sup>33</sup> By early August, according to Hayashi Saburō, Army Headquarters estimated Soviet strength on the Soviet-Manchuria border to be 1.6 million troops, with 6,500 airplanes and 4,500 tanks.<sup>34</sup> Shiroki concluded that, because the Russian troops were not equipped with winter uniforms and equipment, the Soviet Union might commence its military operation against Japan on August 1, so as to complete its occupation of Manchuria in the months of September and October, before the winter sets in.<sup>35</sup>

---

30 Hayashi Saburō, *Kantōgun to Kyokutō Sorengun* [The Kwantung Army and the Soviet Army in the Far East] (Tokyo, 1974), 242–43.

31 Sejima Ryūzō, *Sokoku saisei* [Restoring the fatherland] (Tokyo, 1997), 85–88. Sejima, after the war, became the CEO of the Itoh Chu Company.

32 Hayashi Saburo, 245.

33 *Takagi Nikki*, 2: 855, 918–19.

34 Hayashi Saburō, 246.

35 *Takagi Nikki*, 2: 919.

Faced with this mounting threat, Japan was utterly unprepared. Most of the old elite units of the Kwantung Army had already been removed from Manchuria and redeployed elsewhere in the Pacific. Between January 1943 and January 1945, thirteen Divisions from the Kwantung Army were sent to the South Pacific, and in March 1945, seven more Divisions of the Kwantung Army were reassigned to the Japanese homeland and the Southern region of Korea. To replace them, some twenty-four Divisions were reorganized in haste, recruiting mostly from retired army veterans. Their actual strength, according to Hayashi, amounted to that of a mere eight normal Divisions, while their weapons and equipment were even more ill-prepared.<sup>36</sup> Itō Masanori, a well-known military historian, dubbed it “the toothless army that cannot bite.”<sup>37</sup> Even the vice chief of staff of the Kwantung Army, Major General Matsumura Tomokatsu, declared that the Kwantung Army was reduced to “a Paper Tiger” by the end of 1944.<sup>38</sup> Japan was totally defenseless in Manchuria.

### **Seeking Soviet Mediation: Drive a Wedge Between the United States and the Soviet Union**

The war situation became even more desperate for Japan in April and May 1945. On April 1, American troops landed on Okinawa. On May 1, Hitler took his own life, and on May 8, Germany surrendered. Colonel Takayama Shinobu, a member of the Operation Section of the Army Headquarters, recalls the reaction of his colleagues in his office: “The surrender of Germany and the urgency of the war situation shocked all members of the Operation Section thoroughly. Although no one said anything, what all of us felt equally was that any hope of winning the war was completely extinguished (*kanzen ni shōmetsu shita*).”<sup>39</sup>

---

36 Hayashi Saburō, 249-50.

37 Itō Masanori, *Teikoku rikugun no saigō* [The last years of the imperial army] (Tokyo, 1961), 5: 161-63.

38 Matsumura Tomokatsu, *Kwantōgun sambōfukuchō no shuki* [Writings of the vice chief of staff of the Kwantug Army] (Tokyo, 1977), 19-21

On April 7, Koiso resigned as the prime minister, and Admiral Suzuki Kantarō formed a new cabinet. The most urgent task for the new government was to avert the Russian attack. On April 29, Colonel Tanemura Sakō of the Operation Division presented an extremely important policy proposal entitled "An Opinion in Dealing with the Soviet Union." After emphasizing "the absolute need" for avoiding the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, which would effectively seal the fate of Japan, he proposed to actively find a way to drive a wedge between the United States and the Soviet Union as follows: "In order to fulfill our mission to fight the United States successfully to the end, we should place our main objective to cause discord between America and England on one hand and the Soviet Union on the other in the Chinese mainland, and for this we should be willing to sacrifice [our interests] in the [Japanese] empire, Manchuria, and China so as to induce Russia to our side." Tanemura was willing to concede to the Soviet Union these points: Manchuria (including Liaodong Peninsula) and its railroads, recognition of the Yan'an government in place of the Nationalists, withdrawal of the Japanese troops from China, the Southern Sakhalin, and Korea. We should keep in mind here that the Tanemura proposal calls for Japan to resist and fight against the United States to the last man while negotiating with the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup>

Soon after Tanemura's proposal, the highest army and navy officials, including Umezu Yoshijirō, the army chief of staff, Kawabe Torashirō, the army vice chief of staff, and Ozawa Jisaburō, the navy vice chief of staff, called on Foreign Minister Tōgō Shigenori one after another to plead for finding a way to avert Russian entry into the war. They wanted not just to avoid the Russian attack; they wished to develop discord between the United States and the Soviet Union and then induce Russia to cooperate with Japan against the United States.<sup>41</sup> Thus, faced with the certain defeat, Japan decided

---

39 Takayama Shinobu, *Sambōhombu Sakusenka* [Operation section of the Army Chief of Staff] (Tokyo, 1978), 233.

40 *Haisen no kiroku* [Records of the defeat], 343-52; *Shūsen kōsaku no kiroku* [Records of operations to end the war], 2:136-45; and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, 59-61.

41 *GHQ Rekishika Chinjutsu-roku* [Statements to the History department of GHQ], ed. Satō Motoei and Kurusawa Fumitaka, 1: 273-76; Tōgō Shigenori, *Jidai no ichimen* [One aspect of an epoch] (Tokyo, 1985), 327-37.



not to reach out to the United States, against whom they would fight to the last man, but to seek Soviet assistance in ending the war. (A descendant of Korean potters through both parents, who were taken to Japan during the Japanese invasion of Korea during the Imjin War of 1592-98, Tōgō Shigenori and his family had kept the Korean surname of Pak until 1885.<sup>42</sup>)

Between May 12 and 14, the Supreme War Council adopted without the presence of any subordinates a new platform called "Basic Principle for Negotiation between Japan and the Soviet Union," apparently based on Tanemura's proposal. It called for doing everything possible to prevent the Soviet Union from joining the war, as that would "control the life or death of the [Japanese] empire." It wanted not simply to prevent the Soviet entry into the war, but also to induce the Soviets to come to the negotiating table—and not just to secure neutrality but to make Russia "an intermediary for our advantages" in ending the war. Toward this, Japan was prepared to renounce the Portsmouth Treaty and to concede to the Soviet Union: 1) Southern Sakhalin, 2) fishing rights, 3) the opening of the Tsugaru Strait, 4) railroad rights in Northern Manchuria, 5) the Soviet sphere over Inner Mongolia, and 6) lease rights over Lushun and Dairen. It wanted to make Southern Manchuria a neutral zone under Manchukuo, Japan's puppet regime, and "to establish in China a common system (*kōdō taisei*) of the three countries of Japan, the Soviet Union, and China" and their "solidarity (*danketsu*)." (These terms were never explained.) Under this scheme, Japan wanted to maintain full control over Korea, suggesting it regards Korea as an integral part of the Japanese empire.<sup>43</sup>

With this platform agreed upon by the Supreme War Council, Hirota Kōki, a former prime minister and foreign minister, was entrusted with the task of approaching Yakov Malik, the Soviet ambassador to Tokyo, with three objectives: 1) to secure the "amicable neutrality" of the Soviet Union; 2) to induce the Soviet Union to cooperate with Japan in anticipation of a new

---

42 Tōgō Shigehiko, *Sofu, Tōgō Shigenori no shōgai* [The life of my grandfather, Tōgō Shigenori] (Tokyo, 1993), 21-33.

43 *Haisen no kiroku*, 278-79.

international relations in which the Soviets would confront the United States as an adversary, and in which Japan, the Soviet Union, and Communist China would maintain close solidarity; and 3) to suggest Japan's willingness to pay for necessary rewards. In a memo to Hirota, Foreign Minister Tōgō wrote: "Because the Soviet Union will surely confront the United States in the future," Hirota should expound the advantages of "solidarity of Japan, Russia, and China against the United States." Hirota called on Malik three times during the month of June with no result. After the June 29 meeting, Malik refused to meet on the pretext of illness.<sup>44</sup>

Malik, however, was under strict orders from Moscow never to negotiate. Specifically, he was instructed: "You must not provide any reason for the Japanese to depict your talks as negotiation."<sup>45</sup> With the Yalta concessions secure in its hand, the Soviet Union could ill-afford to provoke the wrath of the United States by negotiating with Japan behind its back. Besides, the concessions the United States had given were far more generous than what Japan was proposing. More importantly, the prospect of the Soviets securing concessions in Asia would be far more certain by taking sides with the United States than with Japan, which was on the verge of imminent collapse. Simply, there was no way the Soviet Union would negotiate with Japan against the United States. With the Hirota-Malik talks, Japan wasted the entire month of June; all it did was to expose Japan's desperation and vulnerability to Stalin, who in turn accelerated his preparation for war against Japan before its surrender, as the Soviet Union could secure the Yalta concessions only as a belligerent power, not as a neutral country.

In the meantime, on June 8, the cabinet meeting with the emperor adopted the "Basic Guide for the War," reaffirming the rock-solid determination to fight the United States to the very last man on the Japanese homeland, even though various ministers at the meeting presented pessimistic reports in continuing the war.<sup>46</sup> The "Basic Guide," however, alarmed Kido Kōichi, who

---

44 Hirota Kōki (Tokyo, 1966), 354-69; *Shūsen shiroku*, 3: 13-17, 123-27.

45 Boris Slavinsky, *The Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact*, tr. Geoffrey Jukes (London: Routledge-Curzon, 1995), 170.

made a critical step—a step that for the first time moved Japan toward seeking seriously a way for ending the war. On the same date, Kido presented to the emperor “A Trial Proposal to Cope with the Current Situation,” in which he wrote: “The ability to carry on the war has in fact nearly been lost.” As Kido reviewed the stark reality confronting Japan—ravaged by destructive air attacks, with extreme shortages in food and clothing—he feared the possible outbreak of social unrest. Although “the righteous way” should be for the military to propose peace, which was “nearly impossible” under the current situation, he wrote. To avoid the fate that had befallen Germany, and to protect the safety of the royal family and the national polity, Kido appealed to the emperor to render his “courageous decision” to bring peace. He then proposed to seek mediation by the Soviet Union, rather than negotiating directly with the United States, on the grounds that Japan would gain “more room” in negotiating for “an honorable peace.” Kido also proposed “a unilateral withdrawal of all military troops from those areas Japan occupied.”<sup>47</sup> On June 22, seeing the Hirota-Malik talks going nowhere, the emperor told the Supreme War Council to come up with “a concrete plan, uninhibited by any earlier concepts” to terminate the war speedily.<sup>48</sup>

In the meantime, made anxious by the visit of T. V. Soong, the Chinese prime minister, to Moscow at the beginning of July, and by the plans for Truman, Churchill, and Stalin to meet soon at Potsdam, the Supreme War Council decided to dispatch a special envoy to Moscow to seek the assistance of the Soviet Union as an intermediary in bringing an end to the war. On July 12, the emperor formally appointed Konoe Fumimaro as his personal representative for the mission. On the same date, the Japanese foreign ministry requested the Soviet Union to receive Konoe in Moscow with a personal message from the emperor to bring peace as soon as possible. The Japanese request actually did not define its objective clearly, other than to state that Japan wanted peace through the use of the Soviet Union as an intermediary. At

---

46 *Haisen no kiroku*, 256–77.

47 Kido Kōichi, *Kido Kōichi nikki* [*Diary of Kido Koichi*] (Tokyo, 1966), 2: 1208–09; (Hereafter *Kido nikki*); and *Shūsen shiroku*, 3: 89–107.

48 *Kido nikki*, 2: 1212–13; *Shūsen shiroku*, 3: 114–15.

the same time, the emperor's message made it clear that as long as the United States insisted upon "an unconditional surrender," Japan would resist and fight to the last man for "honorable peace." Also, because time was of the essence, Japan asked Russia to provide air transportation for the mission from the Manchu-Siberia border to Moscow.<sup>49</sup> What an irony that Imperial Japan turned to Joseph Stalin, of all people, to beseech his help to save its emperor and national polity!

The Soviet Union, however, never gave any clear answer to the Japanese request. Raising nitpicking questions, such as to whom the letter was addressed and asking for more specific ideas for the mission, the Russian Foreign Ministry delayed giving a clear response as to whether to accept or reject it.<sup>50</sup>

On July 18, at Potsdam, Stalin showed Truman the emperor's letter, asking his opinion. Truman, fully apprised of the Japanese move through the "MAGIC" code-breaking, replied that he had "no faith" in the Japanese. Whereupon, in what he called "a stalling maneuver," Stalin said that he would handle the Konoe mission in such a way as to "lull the Japanese into sleep."<sup>51</sup> The Soviet Union then told Japan that it was "impossible to give any firm answer" to the request in view of the absence of any specific proposals for the Konoe mission.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Soviet Union neither accepted nor rejected the mission, but kept it in suspense. Then, on July 26, the Potsdam Declaration—an ultimatum calling for Japan to surrender—was proclaimed.

Cornered for a total defeat, Japan chose to seek mediation by the Soviet Union to bring an end to the war, rather than to approach the United States for peace. Several avenues for contacting the U.S. were available through neutral countries and the Vatican, as well as Allen Dulles of the Office of Strategic Services, but after deliberation, Japan decided not to follow these routes.<sup>53</sup> If Japan had reached out to the U.S. during June and July, or if,

---

49 *Shūsen shiroku*, 3: 159-88.

50 *Shūsen shiroku*, 3: 159-204.

51 Harriman, 492.

52 *Shūsen shiroku*, 3: 162-63.

53 Tōgō Shigenori, 332.

even though it was late, Japan had accepted the Potsdam Declaration without delay, the war could have easily been terminated without the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or Soviet entry into the war, thus averting the tragic division of Korea. Why did Japan reject the United States and opt instead to seek Soviet assistance?

### **Contrasting Views of the United States and the Soviet Union**

The Japanese decision to seek out Soviet assistance was made based on the willful and careful calculation to avoid the United States. There may be many reasons for this decision, but I will cite only two here: one is Japan's contrasting perception of the United States and the Soviet Union, and the other, Japanese calculations of power configurations in Asia after the war.

The contrast in the Japanese military leadership's perception and understanding of the United States and the Soviet Union was truly remarkable. For the Japanese military leaders, the United States was an embodiment of an evil civilization, which was simply incompatible with "the spirit of Yamato," the core value embedded in the foundation of Japanese civilization and culture. They believed that the ideas of democracy and liberalism as championed by the United States were irreconcilable and incompatible with a Japanese state with the emperor at its center. The United States' worship of individualism and materialism was seen as a sign of moral decadence and degeneration. In September 1944, the Military Section of the Army Ministry, the powerful bastion of war hawks, prepared a study for dealing with the worst possible situation for a defeated Japan, in which it envisioned that the United States would impose four points : 1) American occupation and stationing of its troops in the Japanese homeland, 2) disarmament of the army and navy and halting production of weapons, 3) the abolition of the emperor system and enforcement of a democratic political system, and 4) destruction of the Yamato people by forcing them to emigrate to China, Africa, India, New Guinea, and Australia as slaves, along with massive in-migration of Koreans and Chinese to Japan.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> *Shūsen kōsaku no kiroku*, 1: 424–25.

In addition, wartime propaganda depicted and caricatured Americans as subhuman brutes, as John Dower aptly expounds.<sup>55</sup> Under the heading of "Human(s) have a Human Way, but Enemies are Not Humans," for example, Tokutomi Sohō, the doyen of the Japanese press, published a commentary in the *Asahi Shimbun* depicting the Americans as "devilish brutes who should only be exterminated" for the well-being of the Japanese. An editorial in the *Yumiuri Shimbun* on January 16, 1945, characterized the American war objective as "to conquer and rule Asia as a permanent colony for exploitation to satisfy their insatiable desire to enslave the Asian people with the iron chains of monetary power and material resources."<sup>56</sup>

The Soviet Union, in contrast, shared many common interests with Japan, in spite of ideological and political conflicts. Matsuoka Yōsuke, the foreign minister in 1940–41 and the architect of the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact, told Stalin that "the Japanese are moral communists, and its ideal has been inherited for milliard generations from remote antiquity," but this moral communism had been undermined by the Western influence of liberalism and individualism, causing great confusion in Japan.<sup>57</sup> Nishida Kitarō, the founder of "the Nishida philosophy," in which many Japanese take great pride, stated in February 1945 that he believed that the world, including Japan, would evolve toward the Soviet system in future, rather than American capitalism.<sup>58</sup> Prime Minister Suzuki Kantarō had a very naïve view of Stalin; in supporting the Konoë mission to Moscow, he said that Stalin was very much like Saigō Takamori, the hero of the Meiji Restoration, who in the eyes of many Japanese epitomized moral uprightness, humanity, and magnanimity.<sup>59</sup>

There is also the rather startling statement by Kido Kōichi to his banker

---

55 John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), chapters 8 and 9. I was exposed to such indoctrinations throughout my primary school years in colonial Korea.

56 Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, *Ankoku nikki* [Diary of darkness], (Tokyo, 1975), 3: 18–19.

57 Matsuoka Yōsuke: *sono hito to shōgai* [Matsuoka Yosuke: his life and career], (Tokyo, 1974), 857–58.

58 *Hosokawa nikki*, 2: 340.

59 Tōgō Shigenori, 332; *Shūsen shiroku*, 2: 254.

friend Munakata Hisataka on March 3, 1945, which Munakata recorded in his diary. Worried over the unfavorable war situation, Kido said that the ultimate outcome of the war would be determined by how the Soviet Union would act, and that any negotiation for peace with the United States was out of the question. He then envisioned the Japanese army joining hands with the Soviet Union to resist the United States. "As for Communism," Kido said, "there is no longer any need to fear it now. All the countries in the world are now under Communism, aren't they? Europe is likewise under it and China is likewise under it. Only America remains an exception, doesn't it?" Dumbfounded, Munakata asked: What about the imperial family and the national polity under Communism? Shouldn't Japan negotiate with the United States, rather than wait for Russian intervention? Kido replied: "From the standpoint of the current situation facing Japan, it does not matter. It is better to hold hands with Russia. There is a strong air that how can we tolerate to surrender to the United States. Eventually, the Japanese Imperial Army will hold hands with Communism."<sup>60</sup>

Such were the views of the Japanese leaders toward the United States and the Soviet Union as they rejected the United States and solicited Stalin to mediate on behalf of Japan.

## **To Drive a Wedge Between the United States and the Soviet Union**

A more serious reason for the delay in the surrender was the Japanese calculation of power alignments in Asia after the war. As both Akira Iriye and Hatano Sumio point out, the Japanese military leadership came to believe that the United States and the Soviet Union would eventually confront each other as adversaries, which Japan could exploit to its advantage.<sup>61</sup> Throughout

---

<sup>60</sup> "Munakata Hisataka nikki" (unpublished) as quoted in Matsuura Masataka, "Munakata Hisataka to mō hitotsu no shūsen kōsaku [Munakata Hisataka and one more attempt to end the war]," (2) *UP* [University Press], No. 292, (1997), 25-26 (I am indebted to an anonymous librarian at Keio University for this information).

<sup>61</sup> Iriye, *Power and Culture*, 181-84, 241; and Hatano Sumio, "Senji gaikō to sengo kōsō [Diplomacy during the war and postwar concept]," in Hosoya Chihiro et. al., *Daiheiyō*

the war, Japan pursued what Hosoya Chihiro calls “the diplomacy of delusion” toward the Soviet Union in desperate efforts to keep its neutrality.<sup>62</sup> Soon after the Pearl Harbor attack, on January 10, 1942, the War Liaison Council, the predecessor of the Supreme War Council, adopted a basic policy toward the Soviet Union. First, it wanted peace and stability—“*seihitsu*”—on its northern borders. Second, it called for a policy “to prevent the Soviet Union from strengthening its cooperation with United States and England, and, going further, to drive a wedge between them.”<sup>63</sup> This is the plan Japan scrupulously adhered to and actively promoted throughout the war. Until the fall of Germany, Japan attempted seriously to forge a tripartite coalition of Japan, Germany, and the Soviet Union against the United States. But once Germany collapsed, Japan exerted an all-out effort to coax Russia to join its side. The underlying assumption in these efforts was a belief that the Soviet Union would not wish Japan to become a weak power.

In September 1944, Morishima Gorō, the minister to Russia, was summoned to Tokyo for new instructions. At a meeting on September 17 with Umezu Yoshijirō, the army chief of staff, Hata Hikosaburō, the army vice chief of staff, stated: “In the future balance of power between the Soviet Union on one hand and the United States and England on the other, a weak Japan would be disadvantageous to the Soviet Union. Therein lies a possibility for diplomacy to draw the Soviet Union to our side.”<sup>64</sup> In May 1945, when the Supreme War Council deliberated peace through mediation by a third country, they concluded that it would require unconditional surrender, which would be unacceptable. Whereupon, according to Tōgō Shigenori, Umezu stated that “there is no country except the Soviet Union who could mediate for our

---

*sensō no shūketsu* [Terminating the Pacific war] (Tokyo, 1997).

62 Hosoya Chihiro, “Taiheiyō sensō to Nihon no tai-So gaikō—gensō no gaikō [The Pacific War and diplomacy toward the Soviet Union—diplomacy of delusion],” in *Ryōdaisenkan no Nihon gaikō, 1914-1945* [Japanese diplomacy in between the two great wars, 1914-1945]. (Tokyo, 1988), 303-36.

63 *Sugiyama memo* (Tokyo, 1989), 2: 4.

64 *Shōwa no dōran to Morishima Gorō* [Turbulence during the Showa era and Morishima Goro], ed. Morishima Yasuhiko (Fukuoka, 1985), 186; and *Gaimushō no 100-nen* [100 years of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 2: 647.



advantage." To which, Anami Korechika, the army minister, said: "As the Soviet Union will confront the United States after the war, Russia would not wish to have Japan weakened too much, and hence there should be some room [for Japan to maneuver]."<sup>65</sup> The Japanese believed that the Soviet Union and the United States would eventually confront each other as rival powers, in which Japan could play an important role as a power balancer. This concept governed all of the Japanese approaches to the Soviet Union in the last months of the war.

Ozawa Jisaburō, the navy vice chief of staff, testified after the war that he had discussed how to end the war on several occasions after March 1945, in which one of the ideas he raised was: "If the Japanese army were to be completely withdrawn from the Chinese mainland to create a vacuum and allow the Soviet army to move into the North while the Anglo-American army takes over the South, these armies would lead to a condition of confrontation. Such a situation would create a new international relationship, which we could use to our advantages in ending the war."<sup>66</sup> On May 11, the Supreme War Council discussed this issue, and in the end, both Anami and Umezu gave "wholehearted support" for withdrawing troops from China to induce the Soviet Union to confront the United States.<sup>67</sup> On May 11–14, as we saw above, the Supreme War Council formally adopted the "Basic Principle for Negotiation between Japan and the Soviet Union," calling for "the tripartite solidarity of Japan, China, and the Soviet Union" and outlining its willingness to relinquish Northern Manchuria, Liaodong, and other rights to the Soviets, which then was followed by the Hirota-Malik talks in June.

## **Abandon Manchuria**

The primary mission of the Kwantung Army was from the outset to defend Manchuria at all cost. But as soon as Russia declared war against Japan on

---

<sup>65</sup> Tōgō Shigenori, 332.

<sup>66</sup> *GHQ Chinjutsu-roku*, 2: 904-05; Matsutani, 134-35.

<sup>67</sup> *Takagi oboegaki*, 236–37; and *Takagi nikki*, 2: 861–62.

August 8, 1945, the Kwantung Army was ordered to abandon Manchuria. On August 10, the Kwantung Army received a new operation order from the Army Headquarters in Tokyo, which, according to Matsumura Tomokatsu, the vice chief of staff of the Kwantung Army, consisted of just two points: 1) "The objective of the Army Headquarters is to complete successfully the main operation against the United States, but because the Soviet Army attacked unexpectedly, your mission is to undertake an entirely new operation to destroy the Soviet troops in order to preserve the national polity and to defend and secure the Imperial Land"; and 2) "The Commander-in-chief of the Kwantung Army should direct its main operation against the Soviet and destroy the enemy as it encounters it in order to protect and secure Korea."<sup>68</sup>

Although it is not easy to grasp the meaning of this convoluted text, Matsumura offers further explanation. With this order, according to Matsumura, the Kwantung Army was given for the first time the new mission of "defending and securing the Imperial Land." In other words, according to Matsumura, "the Kwantung Army was relieved of its original mission of defending Manchuria" and was "reassigned to take part in defending and securing the Imperial Land, for which it will bring the [Japanese] Army of Korea under its command." Matsumura further explains: Previously, the Kwantung Army was prepared to die at Donghua (in Southern Manchuria), but with the new order, "we were to fight until death defending Keijō (Seoul)."<sup>69</sup> As soon as the Soviet Union declared war, Japan decided to abandon Manchuria, conceding it to Russia, and to concentrate its efforts to defend the Japanese homeland, which includes Korea. Japan had no intention to fight the Soviet Union in Manchuria at all.

## **Matsutani Plan**

In the meantime, in November 1944, Matsutani Makoto, who, as we saw above, being dismissed from the Army Headquarters for raising the taboo

---

<sup>68</sup> Matsumura Tomokatsu, 65.

<sup>69</sup> Matsumura Tomokatsu, 65-69.

subject of defeat and peace, was recalled from China to Tokyo to become the secretary to Sugiyama Hajime, the army minister; later in April 1945, Masutani took the same position with Prime Minister Suzuki. Matsutani writes in his memoir that his primary duty as the secretary was to study and propose in private how "to settle the war" on behalf of the prime minister, the army minister, and the army chief of staff.<sup>70</sup> He set up a small clandestine study group, which included Mōri Hideoto of the National Planning Board and Takemura Tadao of Keiō University, and in the end came up with the "Record of Managing Termination of the War (Shūsen Shori no Kiroku)." This important study is a comprehensive blueprint for how Japan should terminate the war and cope with the military, political, economic, and cultural aspects of the postwar situation, such as the mobilization of human and natural resources (i.e., the Japanese terrain is unfavorable for guerilla war), the negotiations for ceasefire and peace, the survival of its people, and the preservation of the purity of Japanese blood, protecting women's chastity among others. What is significant here is its outlook in the future geopolitics between the United States and the Soviet Union. It envisioned that the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States would deteriorate to the point of confrontation within two or three months after the end of the war in Europe—as soon as July-August 1945. To coincide with this, it called for peace overtures to the Soviet Union with the ultimate goal of preserving the national polity. It even predicted the outbreak of a Third World War between the United States and Russia in the not too distant future. It argued that the Soviet policy for minority peoples was based on "tolerance" and "self-determination" in its efforts for Communization, and that the Japanese polity and Communism were not necessarily incompatible. As for the postwar reconstruction, it foresaw that Japan would inevitably develop a socialist economy, and "a people's government of the Soviet-style," rather than American democracy.<sup>71</sup> The three top decision makers—the prime minister, the army minister, and the army chief of staff—were given such a study as they tried desperately to salvage the defeat at the hands of the United States.

---

70 Matsutani Makoto, 115–16, 156–57.

71 Matsutani Makoto, 257–328.

But the Japanese attempt to drive a wedge between the United States and the Soviet Union had no possibility for success at all. In fact, Stalin was fearful that the Japanese efforts to reach out to Moscow to alienate the alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States might make America suspect Russia was negotiating with Japan behind the scenes. To Harry Hopkins, on May 26–28, 1945, Stalin warned that “the Japanese try to split the allies” and wanted “to go through with unconditional surrender and destroy once and for all the military might and forces of Japan.”<sup>72</sup>

Tsuyosi Hasegawa, who studied the Japanese surrender more extensively and perceptively than any others, asserts the Japanese attempt to gain Soviet mediation as an act of delusion as follows:

There was absolutely no possibility of bringing an end to the war by means of relying on the Soviet Union in order to protect the national polity. But so long as it could not accept an unconditional surrender, Japan used the Soviet Union as the last resort just as a drowning person trying desperately to hang on to a mere straw. Truly, for the Japanese leaders, the Soviet Union acted as “opium” that enabled them to escape the stern reality and to indulge in the world of delusion.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, deprived of rational thinking, the Japanese war leadership was living in a world of delusion, as if addicted to opium, and refused to reach out to the United States for peace, pleading instead with the Soviet Union for mediation. This was an act of delusion that delayed the Japanese surrender, enabling the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the tragic imposition of the national division of Korea.

---

72 Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 902-03; Feis, *Between War and Peace*, 114–15.

73 Hasegawa Tsuyoshi, “Shūsen no kikai o nogoshitsuzuketa shidōshatachi no sekinin [Responsibility of those leaders who kept missing the opportunities for ending the war],” *Chūō koron* (September 2006), 107.

## Conclusion

The division of Korea came about as a result of the Soviet entry into the war against Japan. Until the Soviet Union declared war on August 8, 1945, Japan and Russia remained neutral. For a mere one week of fighting, the Soviet Union became a belligerent power against Japan and moved into Korea, causing its tragic division. By late 1944, nearly all the Japanese leadership, including the emperor, concluded that the war had been lost with no hope of recovery. The situation became even more hopeless as, on April 1, 1945, the United States began to occupy Okinawa, and on May 8, Germany surrendered. Japan then confirmed the massive buildup of the Russian military power along the Manchurian border, concluding the Soviet Union would commence its attack in early August. Japan also believed that the United States would launch amphibious attacks against its homeland in the fall. Utterly exhausted, Japan knew full well that it had lost the war.

What choices did Japan have? The obvious and logical option was to approach the United States, its main enemy, to terminate the war. This Japan rejected willfully and deliberately. As late as June 8, 1945, The Imperial Conference with the emperor adopted the resolution to fight the United States with firm determination to defend the Imperial Land to the last man. An ostensible reason was that the United States wanted to impose an unconditional surrender and to do away with the emperor and its national polity. But the terms of surrender the United States demanded as specified in the Potsdam Declaration were not “unconditional” at all—far from it. In fact, in the Declaration, the United States promised to preserve the nationhood of Japan, assuring its political and economic viability. What the United States wanted to do away with was its militarism. Though the status of the emperor was not mentioned specifically, the Declaration made it clear that it would permit the Japanese people to choose the form of their future government. As the Supreme War Council deliberated the ultimatum, Foreign Minister Tōgō and other officials underscored repeatedly that the terms of the Potsdam Declaration were “not unconditional” at all and were acceptable. And yet, Japan delayed its acceptance until after the Soviet Union declared the war.

What was Japan's true motive for rejecting the United States? Japan wanted to continue to maintain its hegemonic power in Asia even after the war. This dream would be impossible as long as the United States and its power were present in Asia. What Japan schemed was to build "a solidarity" of the tripartite countries of Japan, the Soviet Union, and Communist China to counter the United States. Toward this goal, Japan rejected the United States and attempted to reach out to Russia, staking its future with the Soviet Union and its Communist system.

The motive behind the Japanese attack against the United States at Pearl Harbor in December 1941 was the ambition to expand and consolidate its control and supremacy in Asia. Dazzled by the spectacular success Nazi Germany had attained in Europe in the early phase of the Second World War, Japan was determined "not to miss the bus" in the global scheme of carving out the spheres of influence, in which Hitler doled out, in the form of "the Ribbentrop Plan," all of Asia, east of India. Intoxicated by its own remarkable success achieved in the early stage of the Pacific War, Japan conceived its own vision of the Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere in the hope of perpetuating its dominance as the hegemonic power over Asia. Even facing total defeat in the Pacific War, Japan never abandoned this dream. Megalomaniac delusions prompted the Japanese militarists to provoke the war in the Pacific, and it was these same delusions that delayed Japan's surrender.

Two epic tragedies resulted from the Pacific War. One was the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The other was the division of the Korean Peninsula. These tragedies could have easily been averted but for the delusion of Japanese militarism.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources: English

Department of Defense. *Entry of the Soviet Union Into the War Against Japan, 1941-45. (Mimeographed)*, 1955.

Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Paper: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945.*

Deane, John. R. *Strange Alliance*. New York: Viking Press, 1947.

Harriman, W. Averell, and Elie Abel. *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946*. New York: Random House, 1975.

Sherwood, Robert E. *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History*. New York: Harper, 1950.

### Primary Sources: Japanese

Gaimushō. *Shūsen shiroku*. 7 volumes. Tokyo, 1977.

*GHQ Rekishika chinjutsu-roku*. Edited by Satō, Motoei, and Kurusawa Fumitaka. Tokyo, 2002.

*Hirota Kōki*. Tokyo, 1966.

Hosokawa, Morisada. *Jōhō tennō ni dassezu: Hosokawa nikki*. Tokyo, 1978.

Konoe, Fumimaro. *Konoe nikki*. Tokyo: 1968.

Kido, Kōichi. *Kido Kōichi nikki*, vol. 2. Tokyo, 1966.

Kiyosawa, Kiyoshi. *Ankoku nikki*, vol. 3. Tokyo, 1975.

*Matsuoka Yōsuke: Sono hito to shōgai*. Tokyo, 1974.

Matsumura, Tomokatsu. *Kantōgun sambōfukuchō no shuki*. Tokyo, 1977.

Matsutani, Makoto. *Daitōa sensō shūshū no shinsō*. Tokyo, 1980.

Sambōhombu shozō. *Haisen no kiroku*. Tokyo, 1989.

Sambōhombu, ed., *Sugiyama memo*. 1989.

Shigemitsu, Mamoru. *Shigemitsu Mamoru shuki*. Tokyo, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Saikō sensō shidō kaigi kiroku*. Tokyo, 2004.

*Shūsen kōsaku no kiroku*. Edited by Kurihara, Ken and Watanabe Sumio. 2 volumes. Tokyo, 1986.

Takagi, Sōkichi. *Takagi Sōkichi nikki to jōhō*. vol. 2. Tokyo, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Takagi kaigun shōshō oboegaki*. Tokyo, 1979.

Tanemura, Sakō. *Daihorī ei kimitsu nisshi*. Tokyo, 1985.

Tōgō, Shigenori. *Jidai no ichimen: Tōgō Shigenori gaikō shuki*. Tokyo, 1985.

### Secondary Sources: English

Butow, Robert J. C. *Japan's Decision to Surrender*. Stanford: Stanford University, 1954.

Dower, John W. *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and Japanese Experience*. Cambridge: Harvard University, Council on East Asian Studies, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

Feis, Herbert. *Between War and Peace: The Potsdam Conference*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1960.

Hasegawa, Tsuyoshi. *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Iriye, Akira. *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Kase, Toshikazu. *Journey to the Missouri*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

Slavinsky, Boris. *The Japanese-Soviet Neutrality: A Diplomatic History, 1941-1945*. Translated by Geoffrey Jukes. London: Routledge-Curzon, 1995.

### Secondary Sources: Japanese

Hasegawa, Tsuyoshi. "Shūsen no kikai o nogoshitsuketa shidōshatachi no sekinin." *Chūō Kōron*, September 2006.



- Hatano, Sumio. "Senji gaikō to sengo kōsō," in Hosoya Chihiro, et. al. *Daiheiyō sensō no shūketsu*, Tokyo, 1997.
- Hattori, Takushirō. *Daiheiyō sensō zenshi*. Tokyo, 1965.
- Hosoya, Chihiro. "Daiheiyō sensō to Nihon no tai-So gaikō: gensō no gaikō." *Ryōdaisenka no Nihon gaikō, 1914-1945*. Tokyo, 1988.
- Hayashi, Sabuirō. *Kantōgun to kyokutō no Sorengun*. Tokyo, 1974.
- Inoue, Kiyoshi. *Shōwa tennō no sensō sekinin*. Tokyo, 1975.
- Itō, Masanori. *Teikoku rikugun no saigō*. vol. 5. Tokyo, 1961.
- Matsuura, Masataka. "Munakata Hisataka to mō hitotsu no shūsen kōsaku." *UP*, no. 292 (1997).
- Yamada Akira and Koketsu Atsushi, *Ososugita seidan: Shōwa tennōno sensō shidō to sensō sekinin*. Tokyo, 1991.

