

Comparative Analysis of Japan and U.S. Global Strategy 1941-43

Ikuhiko Hata

This report comparatively examines two major documents created respectively by Japan and the United States of America regarding war prospects prior to the war between those countries breaking out. At the same time, it provides an overview of revisions made in light of subsequent changes in the complexion of the war and other conditions.

Of these two documents that can be called "grand strategies," Japan's "Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War against the U.S., Great Britain, Holland and Chiang"¹ (hereinafter referred to as the "Draft Proposal"; approved on November 15, 1941, by the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters;) was part of a set with the "Guidelines for Implementing National Policy" decided by the Imperial Conference on November 5, 1941, following the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters (hereinafter referred to as the "Liaison conference") on November 1. A member of the Office of the Army's General Staff at the time, Lt. Colonel Kumao Imoto, described the Draft Proposal as "the only grand strategy written before the start of the war that almost perfectly expressed the core intentions of the top leaders."² Under the conditions at the time, there was no alternative plan.

The U.S. document, the "Victory Program" (or, "Victory Plan"; September 1941), was part of a set that included the Lend Lease Act (March 1941), Rainbow No.5 (May 1941), and the Plan Dog (November 1940). After the war, the program's chief author, Major Albert C. Wedemeyer, said that the plan matched the actual war to a surprising degree.³ In his memoirs, however, Wedemeyer emphasized that in the end, the Victory Program aided the victories of Great Britain and the U.S.S.R., with the U.S.S.R. receiving the greatest benefit.

A comparison of the main points of the Japanese and U.S. documents finds some major differences, but also many points in common.

¹ War History Office, National Defense College, *Daihonei Rikugunbu (2)* (Imperial Army Headquarters [2]), 1968, pp. 642-644.

² Kumao Imoto, *Sakusen nisshi de tsuzuru daitousensou* (History of the Greater East Asia War based on operational diaries), FuyoShoboShuppan, 1979, p. 57.

³ A. C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* (Japanese trans. By Sadao Seno), Kodansha, 1997, vol. 1, chapter 5. See also M. S. Watson, *The War Department Chief of Staff: Prewar Plan and Preparations* (Historical Division, Dept. of the Army, USA, 1950), Chapter XI, for details of the process of creating the Victory Plan.

Japan's Draft Proposal was written after Emperor *Hirohito* instructed Prime Minister Hideki Tojo to summarize the outlook for the end of the war. As Minister of the Army, Tojo ordered Col. Akiho Ishii through the head of the Military Affairs Bureau, Gen. Akira Muto, to draft the proposal. The Draft Proposal was taken up by the Liaison Conference on November 13, 1941 (and decided on the 15th). However, the content of the discussion is not noted in the "Sugiyama Memo," which recorded the proceedings of the Liaison Conference at that time.⁴ Problematically, there are also very few traces of discussion of the Draft Proposal in relevant government organs between its submission to the Liaison Conference and its approval.

On the other hand, the U.S.'s Victory Program was clearly created at the initiative of President Franklin Roosevelt. The President ordered Secretary of War Henry Stimson to create a plan. Stimson passed the order on to Army Chief of Staff George Marshall, and the task was delegated to Major Wedemeyer via his superior, Brigadier Gen. Leonard Gerow. Wedemeyer summarized materials from various government agencies, including the Navy. He made several interim reports to the President, receiving instructions from him each time.

A common point of these two Japanese and U.S. documents is that uniformed army staff officers were in charge of drafting them. The Japanese and U.S. Navies participated in the creation of the plans, but seemingly did not believe that they would necessarily have to follow them.

As is true in any country, the abilities and intentions of the persons who draft grand strategy are vital. Ishii was a 41-year-old Colonel when he drew up the Draft Proposal, while Wedemeyer was a 44-year-old Major when he drafted the Victory Program. By the end of the war, however, Ishii was still a Colonel, but Wedemeyer had risen to the rank of General (4 stars). At first glance, this looks like a major disparity, but Ishii was not overlooked. Instead, he was not promoted because, in war or peace, the Japanese Army's personnel system had no custom of selecting personnel for rapid promotion. There was no great difference in the two men's ability anyway.

Following is a comparison of the content of the two documents.⁵

First, Japan's Draft Proposal focused on how to win or end the war. The main point was cooperation with Germany. If Germany were to force Great Britain to yield and defeat the U.S.S.R. as well, the U.S. would lose its will to continue fighting. In other words, this can be seen as fighting in the end for a tie, with no clear winner or loser. Geographically unable to defeat the U.S.

⁴ The "Sugiyama Memo" for November 13 says only "this matter for deliberation and research should be kept as a concept" (*Sugiyama Memo* (vol. 2), Office of the Army's General Staff edition, Hara Shobo, 1967, p. 519).

⁵ For details, see Ikuhiko Hata, "Sensou shuumatsu kousou no saikentou—nichibei no shiten kara (Reexamining plans to end the war: Japanese and U.S. perspectives)," *Journal of Military History* no. 121/122: "World War II (3): The end of the war" (July 1995).

directly, Japan probably had no choice but to rely on Germany. Additionally, Japan would secure important resource areas to maintain long-term self-sufficiency. In concrete terms, Japan would first occupy resource areas to its south and obtain oil and other resources to convert to military power. Until then, it would take a defensive stance. Any sorties by a U.S. fleet during this period would be met by counterattack.

The U.S.'s Victory Program designated Germany as the primary foe. It projected that if Germany were defeated, Italy and Japan would fall almost as a matter of course. Like the Japanese plan, it relied on other nations. The U.S.S.R. was to batter Germany, with the main force of the U.S. military finally going towards Germany's defeat. During this period, the U.S. would take a defensive stance in the Pacific, with the goal of beginning full-fledged counterattack after July 1, 1943. This was based on the estimate that the U.S. could raise and equip an army of 8.8 million men by that time. The problem was securing not just military power, but also the war production capacity needed for a high level of preparedness. The Victory Program overall can therefore be seen as a program for strengthening war production capacity. In fact, in 1942 the name of the Victory Program was changed to the "War Munitions Program."⁶

In any event, Japan's immediate primary foe was Great Britain, while for the U.S. it was Germany. In both cases, the plans relied on other countries to defeat the main enemy. Japan would rely on Germany, and the U.S. would rely on the U.S.S.R. The question was how each plan would respond to subsequent changes in circumstances.

First, one must bear in mind that World War II was a war between opposing blocs. In Japan's case, the so-called Eurasian Alliance, the Tripartite Pact plus the U.S.S.R. in a four-nation alliance, was expected to confront the U.S. and Great Britain

However, the outbreak of war between Germany and the U.S.S.R. in June 1941 changed this structure. In short, the structure changed to a battle between blocs, the Tripartite Pact between Japan, Germany, and Italy (the Axis) versus the U.S., Great Britain, and the U.S.S.R. (the Allies). Unexpectedly, it became a war between "have nations" and "have-not nations". At the time, U.S. national power was ten times as great as that of Japan, while the combined national power of the Allies was three or four times that of the Axis. In a sense, the winners were determined before the first battle was fought. Moreover, within the Tripartite Pact, Japan and Germany were so isolated from one another geographically that one could scarcely term it a powerful alliance. As these factors became clear, they had major effects on the Japanese and U.S. grand strategies.

⁶ Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 360.

Second, neither Japan nor the U.S. could immediately have a decisive battle with its main opponent. Both had to endure for some time while pursuing strategies that used other countries to fight for them. However, neither country was able to endure for even two years without fighting. In fact, stimulated by the subsequent international situation, both Japan and the U.S. were locally aggressive, creating new battlegrounds. Outside their grand strategies, they had a number of existing plans that could be called "medium" or "compact" strategies. Unavoidably, they sometimes competed with or contradicted the grand strategies that were subsequently developed.

In Japan's case, even as it took as defensive stance as its basic posture, it developed a southern expedition. Furthermore, to prevent the U.S. fleet from hindering its action, Japan carried out the Attack on Pearl Harbor, which met its objectives. The success of the southern offensive exceeded expectations. The initial limits of the invasion were to be Burma in the west, Rabaul in the east, and Timor in the south, but these were expanded. In the second-stage strategy, the geographical scope was expanded to India, Ceylon, and Australia, and from Midway to Hawaii.

The Army and Navy had various ideas for the second-stage strategy. For example, an ambitious plan submitted by the Navy's Real Admiral Tamon Yamaguchi included everything from the occupation of India, Australia, and Hawaii to landings on the U.S. West Coast, to the destruction of the Panama Canal and even advance to South America.⁷ The Yamaguchi proposal was dismissed as a fantasy, "perhaps suitable for a Naval War College war game," as someone commented. However, the Navy did make plans for the occupation of Hawaii, but they crumbled with the loss at the battle of Midway.

The Army also had grandiose ideas. There is a document called the "Proposal for Land Disposition in the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere."⁸ It would have placed the Governments General (Directorate Governors General) over lands occupied by Japan. For example, there was to be a South Pacific Government General covering New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia, etc., an Eastern Pacific Government General for Hawaii, Tahiti, Samoa, Tonga, etc., an Australia Government General for Australia, Tasmania, etc., a New Zealand Government General, a Ceylon Government General, an Alaska Government General, a Central America Government General, and so on. The Alaska Government General was to include western Canada and the U.S. northwestern state Washington, but for some reason most of the U.S. mainland, was not included. The proposal was created around February 1942 by the Army Ministry's Research Department. Four years later, the occupation forces' GHQ confiscated it from

⁷ War History Office, National Defense College, *Senshi susho daihonei kaigunbu rengou kantai (2)* (War history series: Imperial Navy Headquarters Combined Feet [2]), Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1975, pp. 305–307.

⁸ Prosecution document no. 1987, testimony no. 679 (stenographic record dated October 9, 1946).

Kazuo Yatsugi (Secretary General of the Research Society for National Policy) and introduced it as evidence at the Tokyo war crimes tribunal. Yatsugi stated that he thought it a "quite extremely assertive opinion." It was never officially adopted, but it reflects the confident atmosphere of the Japanese Army and Navy drunk on "victory disease."

After various such discussion, on March 7, 1942, the Liaison Conference adopted the "Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War" to regulate second-stage strategy. The first item emulated the Draft Proposal in "maintaining political stance for long-term invincibility while grasping opportunities and taking bold measures" in order to "subdue Great Britain, causing the U.S. to lose its will to fight." Prime Minister Tojo complained that its meaning was unclear, because its text mixed a defensive stance for the Army with an offensive stance for the Navy.⁹ It accorded with the Draft Proposal, where offensives were west-oriented, but the Navy emphasized the second stage, persisting on east-oriented offensives.

At that time in the European war, a new situation was developing. Germany's General Erwin Rommel had invaded Egypt and was closing in on the Suez Canal. Germany strongly urged Japan to send submarines to the Indian Ocean, but the Japanese Navy was apathetic. British General Bernard Montgomery defeated Rommel at El Alamein in October 1942. One cause of the victory was the supplying of the newest type of M4 Sherman tanks rushed to the Suez by the U.S. If Japan had sent a submarine fleet to the Indian Ocean and blockaded the supply route, Montgomery might not have won. As Christopher Thorne has also stated, the greatest fear of the U.S. and Great Britain at the time was a "handshake" by the Japanese and German Armies in Western Asia.¹⁰ The U.S. sent Sherman tanks to the Suez to prevent this from happening.

One reason that Japan had not taken the matter very seriously was that the March 7, 1942, Liaison Conference had concluded that a full-fledged U.S. counterattack would not begin until mid-1943.¹¹ How did it reach that judgment? The essentials of the supposedly secret U.S. Victory Program had actually appeared in the December 2, 1941, *Chicago Tribune*. The U.S. Army and the FBI attempted to trace the leak, even questioning Wedemeyer, but the perpetrator was never discovered. It is possible that the Japanese side learned of this article and lowered its guard, believing that a full-fledged U.S. offensive would come much later.

In fact, in July 1943, the time of the peak goal, the U.S. was invading Sicily. It had reached the goal of mobilizing about 8.8 million men. However, the full-fledged offensive against

⁹ War History Office, National Defense College, *Senshi soshō daihōnei rikugunbu (3)* (War history series: Imperial Army Headquarters [3]), Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1970, p. 517. Takushiro Hattori, *Daitōuasensō zenshi* (Complete history of the Greater East Asia War), Hara Shobo, 1996, p. 294.

¹⁰ Christopher Thorne, *Allies of A Kind*, London, 1978 (Japanese trans. by Yoichi Ichikawa), Soshisha, 1995, vol. 1, p. 197.

¹¹ Ichiji Sugita, *Jōhō naki sensō shidō* (Grand strategy without information), Hara Shobo, 1987, p. 253.

Germany beginning with the Normandy Landings was still a year away. In the Pacific, fierce clashes between the Japanese and U.S. navies continued, with the U.S. invading the Gilbert Islands in November 1943 and the Mariana Islands in June 1944.

By the end of 1943, the U.S. Navy, which always emphasized the war against Japan, had more men and vessels in the Pacific than in the Atlantic, reflecting its aggressive philosophy. Entering 1944, the main force of the U.S. Army and the U.S. Army Air Forces was devoted to the war against Germany, but almost all the Navy's strength was pitted against Japan.

S. E. Morrison wrote that a two-front war was possible because the weapons needed on each front were different.¹² In other words, the war between Japan and the U.S. was fought with navies in the Pacific, while the war between the U.S. and Germany was fought with armies in Europe.

Finally, the author wishes to address two comments he found impressive.

Late in his life, Koichi Kido (Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal), a close adviser of Emperor *Hirohito* said he chose to "hand power to the Army, enter a war with no hope of winning, and destroy the Empire of Japan so that it could start over from the beginning."¹³ Aware from the beginning of the war that Japan would lose, Kido had the security of the emperor system in mind when he successfully opposed the mobilization of Prince Higashikuni Naruhiko, a member of the imperial family. On the other side, Chinese ambassador to the U.S. Hu Shih said, "Even if we lose the national land, losing to Japan will bring the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. onto our side, so China can win in the end."¹⁴

It seems that all the major countries in World War II tried to borrow the strength of other nations, though not fruitfully, in order to win. From the perspective of achieving war objectives, it is no simple matter to judge who won and who lost.

¹² S. E. Morrison, *Strategy and Compromise* (Boston, 1958), p. 78.

¹³ Yoshio Tatai, *Ketsudan shita otoko Kido Koichi no showa* (Man of decision: Kido Koichi's Showa era), Bungeishunju, 2000, pp. 229, 375.

¹⁴ Lu Xijun, "Sekaika suru sensou to chuugoku no 'kokusaiteki kaiketsu'" (Globalizing war and China's "international solution"), in Ken Ishida ed., *Bouchou suru teikoku kakusan suru teikoku* (Expanding empire, diffusing empire), University of Tokyo Press, 2007, pp. 208–209.

Table: Comparison of the Draft Proposal and the Victory Program

	Japan	USA
Immediate main enemy	Great Britain (to be defeated by Germany)	Germany (to be defeated by the U.S.S.R.)
Basic Posture	protracted endurance	from protracted endurance to major offensive
Main battle area	Army: Asian mainland; Navy: Pacific Ocean	Europe
Outcome	Unclear	Assumed to win
Visions for ending	drawn game → unbeaten	Downing Japan