

Japanese Strategy in the Second Phase of the Pacific War

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Introduction

This paper's title, "Japan's Strategy in the Second Phase of the Pacific War" is a far-reaching theme, such as what topics should be handled or what timing should be considered, but it is necessary to narrow down topics due to space limitation. This paper assumes that "the Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War" as decided at the end of September 1943 played a central role in Japan's strategies in the second phase of the Pacific War. With focus on the operation strategy portion of the said Outline, this paper attempts to analyze the meanings of switching from offensive strategy at the time of starting the war to defensive strategy by correlating grand strategies of the Imperial General Headquarters and military operations of the Japanese army and navy. In addition, this paper makes some analyses on operation strategies in the second phase of the Pacific War.

1. Next strategy after completing southward invasion operations

- (1) Basic strategy at the time of starting the war: "The Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War against the U.S., the U.K., Holland, and Chiang"

If a new war against the U.S., the U.K., and Holland occurs while conducting the China Incident (Second Sino-Japanese War), Japan needs to find out how to end such a war. On November 2, 1941, when Premier Tojo, Sugiyama, Chief of the Office of the Army's General Staff, and Nagano, Chief of the Naval General Staff reported their conclusion on their review of national policies to Emperor *Hirohito*, they added they were "researching on possible justifiable reasons to start the war and possible actions to end Japan-U.S. war." Emperor *Hirohito* also wanted them to research on such a theme.¹ Then, when working on the research on "Guideline on Hastening the End of the War against the U.S., the U.K., and Holland," army and naval secretariat staff incorporated the China Incident in the war against "the U.S., the U.K., Holland, and 'Chiang's China'" and decided "the Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War against the

¹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (2)" (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1968), p.642

U.S., the U.K., Holland, and Chiang” (hereinafter, referred to as “Draft Proposal”), outlined as follows at the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters (hereinafter, referred to as “Liaison Conference”) on November 15.²

Principles

1. Japan should secure its self-existence and self-defense by immediately destroying strongholds of the U.S., the U.K., and Holland in the Far East, speed up knocking down Chiang’s government by further taking active measures, make efforts to knock down the U.K. first through an alliance with Germany and Italy, and strive to eliminate the U.S.’s intention to continue a war with Japan.
2. Japan should make efforts to induce third nations by preventing an increase in war enemy nations.

Guidelines

1. The Empire should enjoy strategic advantages by carrying through quick armed warfare to destroy strongholds of the U.S., the U.K., and Holland in East Asia and Southwest Pacific Ocean and should attain long-term self-sufficiency by ensuring important natural resource areas and major traffic lines.

By employing all means, Japan should make efforts to rope in and complete destroy the U.S. naval main forces in a timely manner.

2. Japan, Germany, and Italy should cooperate with one another to first knock down the U.K.
(1) to (3) Omitted
3. Japan, Germany, and Italy should cooperate to take actions on the U.K. and make efforts to extinguish the U.S.’s intention to raise a war.
(1) to (2) Omitted
4. Japan should take further active political/military measures against China to speed up knocking down the Chongqing government.
5. Japan should make efforts to prevent the occurrence of a war against the Soviet Union while performing military operations to the southward.

(Snip)

6. Japan should continue the present policies on French Indochina. (omitted)
7. In order to end the war [Japan] should make efforts to take advantage of the following opportunities:

² “The Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War against the U.S., the U.K., Holland, and Chiang” [Decisions File of the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters, Vol.2 (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

- (1) Main phases of military operations to the southward
- (2) Main phases of military operations on China, in particular, knocking down the Chiang government
- (3) Favorite opportunities in the changing situations of war in Europe, in particular, falling of the U.K. mainland, end of the German-Soviet war, and success in actions on India
(Snip)

This “Draft Proposal” is based on “the Guidelines for the War against the U.S., the U.K., and Holland,” which was examined and generally agreed upon by army and naval staff after their decision “not to avoid a war against the U.S. and the U.K.” on September 6, 1941.³ The Draft Proposal is said to be “the one and only war plan that was prepared in statutory form before starting the war and fully expressed the intentions of war leaders.”⁴

As suggested in its title, the “Draft Proposal” ultimately aimed at ending the war by eliminating the U.S.’s intention to continue a war with Japan. To this end, the Draft Proposal suggested three options as follows. First, Japan should conduct a long-term unbeaten war in East Asia and Southwest Pacific Ocean and invite and completely destroy the allied forces, in particular, the U.S. navy. Second, Japan should take active measures to knock down Chiang’s government. Third, Japan should work with Germany and Italy to beat up the U.K. They put top priority on the third option, but Japan did not have military power to directly knock down the U.K., so the nation put expectations on the Axis nations’ powers based on an estimate that Germany and Italy were gaining advantages. Then, when Japan takes such option, the nation should basically avoid a war against Soviet Union as much as possible.

- (2) Continuing offensive strategy: Deciding on “the Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War” for the first time

In the southern operations (or the First-Stage Operations as mentioned by the Navy), at the beginning of the war, as policymakers at the time expected that Japanese troops would finish off capturing strongholds of the U.S., the U.K., and Holland in Southwest Pacific Ocean, such as the Philippines, Malay Peninsula, Borneo, and Sumatra, at a quicker pace than anticipated, they needed to decide the next-stage strategies as soon as possible. This is because they didn’t make any decision about important directions or priorities of military operational strategies after

³ The 20th Team (the 15th Section) Army General Staff Office, “Confidential War Diary, Vol.3” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies); and “Colonel Akiho Ishii’s Memoirs” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁴ Kumao Imoto, “Great East Asian War Operations Diary” (Fuyo Shobo, 1998), p.57

finishing off capturing southern forts, such as whether or not Japan should put focus on eastward, that is, shifting focus on offensive operations on the allied forces, mainly the U.S. troops in the Pacific Ocean, or alternatively should seek military operations to knock down the U.K. in a tie-up with Germany and Italy.

On March 7, 1942, the “Liaison Conference” decided on “the Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War” (hereinafter, referred to as the “Outline”) as follows.⁵

1. In order to knock down the U.K. and eliminate the U.S.’s fighting spirit, Japan should continue enhancing its existing military gains and prepare for long-term unbeaten political/military strategies while taking active measures if such opportunity should arise.
2. Japan should keep its occupied territories and main transportation lines and encourage the development/use of defense-use important resources to attain self-sufficiency and enhance Japan’s military strength.
3. Japan should decide specific tactics of further aggressive grand strategies, paying due attention to its national strength, military operations’ outcomes, military situations of German-Soviet war, relationship between the U.S. and Soviet Union, and situation of the Chongqing government.
4. Actions on Soviet Union should be based on “the Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War against the U.S, the U.K., Holland, and Chiang” as decided on November 15, 1941, and “Immediate Actions for Addressing Progress of Situations” as decided on January 10, 1942. However, Japan should not use its good offices to end the German-Soviet war.
5. Actions on the Chongqing government should be based on “Strategies on the Chongqing government to Address Progress of Situations” as decided on December 24, 1941.
6. Cooperative actions with Germany and Italy should be based on “the Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War against the U.S, the U.K., Holland, and Chiang” as decided on November 15, 1941.

This “Outline” has the same and previously-defined statements from paragraphs 2 through 6 as the “Draft Proposal” and does not undergo any particular change in its expressions. The problem is paragraph 1, which suggests the overall policy of this “Outline.” This is because after giving the same statement as the Draft Proposal saying, “Japan should continue enhancing its

⁵ “The Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War (March 7, 1942)” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

existing military gains and prepare for long-term unbeaten political/military strategies,” the Outline gives a new expression “taking active measures if such opportunity should arise” in parallel. The first half is what the Army has mainly insisted, putting focus on shifting from an offensive stance to a defensive stance. On the other hand, the second half is the continuation of an offensive stance as insisted by the Navy, suggesting that the Navy decided to take an offensive stance, shifting from “defensive operation” to intercept incoming the U.S. naval forces in West Pacific Ocean, as assumed in the “Draft Proposal” to “early-stage decisive match” concept to send out Japanese fleets to front to defeat the enemy.⁶ In other words, the decision on “Outline” means Japan would pursue long-term unbeaten warfare, the main pillar of the “Draft Proposal,” and also gives significant driving forces to the offensive strategy on the U.S. in the Pacific Ocean to take active measures if an opportunity arises, in other words, the Navy’s offensive operation concept. Tanaka, Director of the First (Operations) Division, Office of the Army’s General Staff, was worried about such change in the Navy’s operation concept,⁷ but the Army and the Navy both were supposedly satisfied with the “Outline” because it generally included what they had been insisting.⁸

(3) A rise of military operations going beyond the cumulative point of attack

Sugiyama, the Chief of the Office of the Army’s General Staff, who made site visits to the southern front lines after the “Outline” was decided, reported the results of his site visits to Emperor *Hirohito*. At that time, he said he was satisfied with smooth operations in the southern front lines and expressed his intention that the Army should leave the war against the U.S. to the Navy and go back to Army’s original continental defense strategy to put more emphasis on preparations for Soviet Union, in particular, solving the China Incident.⁹ To be more specific, he argued that in accordance with the Army-Navy Central Agreement that states the Navy is responsible for security in important frontline zones in the Pacific Ocean, Japan should quickly build up national defenses after the first stage of the southern operations, and should scale down

⁶ Shigeru Fukutome, who served as Director of the First Division of Naval General Staff Office at that time, makes these statements in his reminiscences published after WWII (“What the Navy should regret,” Nippon Shuppan, 1951, p.111).

⁷ “Diary of Shinichi Tanaka, Lt. General, Director of the First Division, the Army General Staff, Vol.2 (out of 7 volumes)” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies); and “Great East Asian War Operations Record, Vol.3” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁸ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (3)” (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1970), p.513; and War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (2)” (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1975), p.287

⁹ “Draft Memorial to the Emperor” [“The 1942 Emperor Report-related Important Documents File, Vol.1, No.2 (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

army forces in the southern operations to enhance flexible national defense in preparation for a long-term war. However, the plan to reduce the army forces from approximately 450,000 soldiers to 250,000 soldiers¹⁰ only assumed light defense, rather than security, and did not pay enough attention to preparation for full-scale national defense by anticipating the enemy's counterattacks, in particular, the offensive actions of landing forces.¹¹

On the other hand, in terms of the operation plan against the U.S., "Imperial Navy Second-Stage Operation Plan," which was drafted on April 15 by the Navy, aims at an early-stage decisive match with the U.S. mainstay fleets, stating that "Japan should conduct surprise attack destructions or offensive operations on the U.S. military bases in the Pacific Ocean, should make efforts to reduce the enemy's maritime or aerial war capabilities, and should, after the successful completion of operations in Indian Ocean and Australia, seek and force the U.S. mainstay fleets (including the U.K. allied forces) into decisive match to destroy them."¹² Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, who particularly pushed ahead with this strategy, carried out the Midway Operation by requesting Naval General Staff Office to conduct it as early as possible. The Midway Operation is a substitute for the Indian Ocean Operation, which was initially planned by the Army and Navy Sections of the Imperial General Headquarters, clearly suggests a shift of focus to an offensive stance in the Pacific Ocean.

At that time, neither the Army nor the Navy clearly defined their cumulative points of the attack. Just and no more, in relation with examining the "Outline," "Great East Asia Region where New Order should be Constructed under Japan's Initiative based on the Current Situations of the Great East Asia War," which was decided at the "Liaison Conference" on February 28, roughly defined the Great East Asia as "Japan, Manchuria, and China as well as the southern regions at latitude 10 south and northward and longitude 90 to 180 east."¹³ In addition, by gradually cutting down requisitioned ships in the fifth month (when the southern operations would be terminated) from 2.1 million tons as of the pre-war period to 1 million tons in the eighth month onward, the Army has the basic operation plan to maintain replenishing Japan's war capabilities dispersed in Manchuria, China, and the southern front lines to carry out small-sized operations and security

¹⁰ Ibid. On March 19, before Chief of the Army General Staff made his site visits in the southern areas, the Army General Staff Office reported "Future Operations" to Emperor *Hirohito*. It planned to reduce the overall military force to 250,000 soldiers, consisting of 7 divisions, 11 independent garrisons (44 battalions), and approximately 50 air companies.

¹¹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (3)," p.353

¹² "Imperial Navy Second-Stage Operation Plan" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies) (Kasumigaseki documents)

¹³ "The Sixth Issue: Great East Asia Region where New Order should be Constructed under Japan's Initiative based on the Current Situations of the Greater East Asia War" ["Decisions File of the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters, Vol.3 (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]; and Office of the Army's General Staff, ed., "Sugiyama Memo, Part 2" (Hara Shobo, 1967), p.88

activities.¹⁴ For this reason, the Army opposed the Navy's plans to attack Australia and Hawaii because such plans would exceed the limiting point of Japan's military advance, but the Army intended to cooperate with the Navy in the FS Operation (collectively referring to military operations to capture Fiji, Samoa, and New Caledonia) because it did not require army soldiers so much. However, as the Army was concerned about the feasibility of replenishment activities or necessary vessel capacities, it planned to avoid the participation of army soldiers in the Midway and Aleutian Operations, which were decided on a very short notice.¹⁵

(4) Impacts of the U.S.'s air raid on Japan's mainland

The U.S.'s military aircrafts dispatched from the Pacific Ocean carried out air raids on Japan's mainland for the first time on April 18. The air raid only posed marginal damages to Japan, but the Army and Navy were seriously shocked with the air raid. To solve the problem, the Navy only had two options: seizing and destroying the U.S. aircraft carriers by carrying out military operations or taking active measures by advancing Japan's patrol bases. This is because the Midway Operation, which the Navy had been preparing for, got more important.¹⁶ The Army strived to enhance air defense capabilities at the homeland, the Army's mainly responsible area, and also intended cleanup operations on the enemy's airports in Zhejiang Province because the U.S. military aircrafts made crash landing in Central China.¹⁷ Because the Army came to understand the Navy's real intention of continuing offensive operations in the Pacific Ocean at this stage, it recognized the importance of the Midway and Aleutian Operations and decided to send army soldiers there.¹⁸ In other words, by suddenly starting to recognize that simply protecting the occupied territories, which were gained in the first-stage operations, would not enhance Japan's long-term war capabilities,¹⁹ the Army had come to support the Navy's offensive operations in the Pacific Ocean.

¹⁴ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (3)," pp.532-533

¹⁵ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (4)" (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1972), p.27

¹⁶ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (2)," p.364

¹⁷ By adding up air units from the southern front line to China Area Army, the Army Section ordered the China Area Army to destroy airports on April 30, 1942. This operation aims at pincer movement on Zhejiang Province between west and east and was started as "Zhejiang-Jiangxi Operation" in mid May.

¹⁸ "Army Order #625" to "Army Order #628" ["Army Orders File, Vol.9" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)] and "Army Directive #1145" to "Army Directive #1146" ["Army Directives File, Vol.6" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

¹⁹ "Diary of Shinichi Tanaka, Lt. General, Director of the First Division, the Army General Staff, Vol.2 (out of 7 volumes)" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

2. Strategy confusions at the time of aggravation of the war situation: From summer 1942 to spring 1943

- (1) Signs of failure of Pacific Ocean's offensive strategy and optimistic judgment on war situations

The Battle of the Coral Sea in early May, which occurred in the process of Port Moresby Capture Operation, the Midway Operation in June, which was strongly desired by the Combined Fleet, and Battles on Guadalcanal Island, which lasted for a half year since August, showed a sign of the reversal of war situations in the Pacific front lines. The Imperial General Headquarters publicly announced the Japanese Navy sank one Saratoga-class aircraft carrier, one Yorktown-class aircraft carrier, and two battleships while suffering from the sinking of a small-sized aircraft carrier and loss of 31 aircrafts in the Battle of the Coral Sea.²⁰ However, this announcement of the Imperial General Headquarters overvalued operation outcomes by faultily recognizing the sinking of USS aircraft Yorktown, which has resulted in undervaluing the U.S. mobile force's war capabilities for Midway Operation.²¹ In particular, aircraft carrier Shokaku was considered as suffering minor damages, but it actually required approximately 3-month-long repair work and could not participate in Midway Operation. In addition, Japan lost approximately 100 carrier-borne aircrafts (including carrier-borne aircrafts of sunken aircraft carrier "Zuiho"), three times as many as the Imperial General Headquarters' announcement. As a result, Japan had no choice but to exclude the Fifth Carrier Division from operational war capabilities. In this context, it is noteworthy that Japanese Navy tended to highly evaluate tactical victories, and only a few naval staff paid attention to strategic failures.²²

In the Battle of the Coral Sea, Japan's Fifth Carrier Division, which was regarded as having rather weaker war capabilities, reportedly won in the battle after running a dead heat with the U.S. navy's regular aircraft carriers that were recognized as the strongest aviation unit in the U.S. navy. As a result, since the First and Second Carrier Division had much stronger war capabilities than the Fifth Carrier Division, more and more Japanese naval staff had an optimistic outlook that the First and Second Carrier Divisions would easily knock down the U.S. aircraft

²⁰ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (2)," p.373

²¹ USS aircraft Yorktown was damaged with bombing, but it participated in Battle of Midway Island after speedy repair work.

²² War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (2)," pp.372-374; and War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (4)," pp.46-47.

carriers. In addition, they also evaluated that even if Japan occupied Midway, the U.S. aircraft carriers would not show up in Midway.²³ However, at the naval combat before Midway Operation, the Combined Fleet had lost 4 state-of-the-art aircraft carriers and 285 carrier-borne aircrafts. Due to this defeat, the Navy faced the underlying problem that it might possibly be unable to carry out future operations, but the Navy Section concluded that military operations would be feasible if they made efforts, and decided the draft of “Immediate Operation Guidance Policy” on June 13.²⁴ This draft represents minor amendments to the basic concepts of “Imperial Navy Second-Stage Operation Plan” as drafted on April 15. The draft stayed focus on offensive operations in the Pacific Ocean, estimated the U.S. would make counterattacks in 1943 at earliest and did not assume the U.S. counterattacks in 1942. As the Navy, which should be more knowledgeable on operations in the Pacific Ocean, took such stance, the Army’s operation staff, which did not know much about the war situations in the Pacific Ocean, made their cooperative plans in line with the Navy operation staff’s plans, and naturally made requests to carry out their predetermined plans as well.²⁵

In “World Affairs Outlook” in late July, the Imperial General Headquarters concluded “The U.S. and the U.K. will have closer ties in their cooperative operations...wait for an opportunity to stage serious counterattacks on the Axis from the end of 1943 onward.”²⁶ In other words, the Imperial General Headquarters estimated that the U.S. and U.K. troops would make counterattacks later than their initial estimate as of drafting the “Outline” in March 1942: “Intending to make large-scale counterattacks on the Axis by enhancing their war capabilities, the U.S. and U.K. would make such large-scale counterattacks in 1943 at earliest.”²⁷

On August 7, shortly after such an optimistic outlook, the U.S. troops invaded and landed on Solomon Islands, and Guadalcanal Island, on which Japanese troops had just completed construction on runways and Tulagi Island that had a seaplane base. In response to this attack, the Imperial General Headquarters immediately decided to recapture these islands without serious research. In the 1st Battle of Solomon Sea that occurred shortly after, the Combined Fleet reported “Great military results,”²⁸ while the Imperial General Headquarters again announced overvalued

²³ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (2),” pp.374-375

²⁴ “Immediate Operation Guidance Policy” [“Operation-related important document file, Vol.2” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

²⁵ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (4),” p.244

²⁶ “Army General Staff Office Telegraph #841” [“Telegraph File of Military Attaché to Germany” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

²⁷ Office of the Army’s General Staff, ed., “Sugiyama Memo, Part 2,” p.67

²⁸ Matome Ugaki, “Fading Victory: The Diary of Admiral Matome Ugaki, 1941-1945” (Hara Shobo, 1968), p.162

military achievements, giving optimistic outlooks on subsequent war situations. This has partly resulted in the Army's poor operational guidance to meet with a setback after using its war capabilities sparingly in the Guadalcanal recapture operations by the Ichiki squad and the Kawaguchi squad. In the "World Affairs Outlook," after the failure of the 3rd Guadalcanal Recapture Operation mainly conducted by the 2nd Division, the Imperial General Headquarters estimated "the war situations would be in favor of the Axis for the time being"²⁹ without changing the estimated timing of the U.S./U.K. counterattacks, saying that the U.S. and U.K. would "start taking offensive stance from the second half of FY1943 onward." The estimation that Japan still took a lead was a great mistake, but army and navy staff could not notice it at that time.

(2) Necessity of Japan's own strategy getting increased to address lower possibilities of the Axis nations' cooperation

Due to the defeat at the Battle of Midway, some military staff started giving up offensive stance to the east and examining the feasibility of offensive stance to the west in a tie-up with Germany and Italy. At that time, the media reported the great success of General Rommel in the North Africa front line. German and Italian troops occupied Tobruk, Libya, the key point in the North African front line, on June 21, and invaded Egypt two days later. On July 19, Italian Premier Mussolini strongly requested Japan to send its naval forces to Indian Ocean to prevent reinforcements from the U.S. and U.K. to Egypt and cooperate with the North African front lines. On July 20, through Ohshima, Japanese Ambassador to Germany, Germany also requested Japan to start a war against Soviet Union.³⁰ Japan and Italy were able to form overall consensus, but these two nations were not strong enough and were not strongly eager for direct cooperation. For this reason, their cooperative operations would not work effectively even if they came true. On the other hand, Japan and Germany had a fundamental gap in their opinions because Germany put top priority on knocking down Soviet Union, while Japan did not want troubles with Soviet Union, so adjusting this gap required particular attention. In this situation, the Japanese government decided its response to Germany at "Liaison Conference" to prevent a war against Soviet Union as much as possible in line with the predetermined strategy and concentrate the war capabilities of Japan, Germany, and Italy on knocking down the U.K.,³¹ by implicitly suggesting smoother operations in

²⁹ "World Affairs Outlook" ["Report File of the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters, Vol.5" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

³⁰ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (4)," pp.401-402

³¹ The 20th Team (the 15th Section), Army General Staff Office, "Minutes of the Liaison Conference between the

Indian Ocean and West Asia in particular. Almost at the same timing as delivering the aforementioned response to military attaché to Germany, Fuhrer Hitler reportedly wanted Japan to do two actions: enhancing sea blockage in East Africa and taking active measures on Vladivostok.³² Japan would like the German army to advance from Caucasia to West Asia, but the German army intended to advance to Southern Caucasia down south in the next year. In other words, even at this timing, when German army reportedly had military advantages, collaboration between Japanese and German armies were practically unfeasible.

While Japan and Germany had negotiations on possible collaborative military operations, General Rommel had no choice but withdrew near Alexandria on October 23 due to counterattack of the U.K. in North African front line. In addition, the German southern military divisions that intended to advance to Middle East could not take control of the strong fort Stalingrad. German and Italian armies lost their ground significantly. Japan and Germany both intended to end the war through specific and substantial collaborative operations via Middle East and West Asia while they were taking a lead. This means that they unfortunately did not have decisive powers to win in their wars on their own and needed to depend on other nation's powers. In this sense, they expected some great power somewhere else to solve the problems. At that time, Japan faced hardships in the Southern Pacific Ocean, while Germany was put in a difficult position in the East front line and North African front line because of the counterattacks of the allied nations. The Axis nations needed strategic alliance the most at that time, but Japan and Germany had a significant strategic gap and could not afford to help each other. The war conditions drastically changed at the end of 1942.

In mid-April 1943, the Japanese envoy to Germany led by Major General Okamoto had discussions with the Japanese embassy staff in Germany at Berlin, which revealed that Germany had different war strategies from Japan in conducting collaborative operations among the Axis nations.³³ Assuming that "sinking the enemy's ships much more than their shipbuilding capabilities"³⁴ would play a key role in the war against the U.S. and the U.K., the Army Section expected the Axis nations' rollback through the submarine operations of the Japanese and German navies. The Navy Section recognized submarine operations as one of the possible operation plans for the third-stage operations, and as for the destruction of marine transport, it put priority on

Government and Imperial General Headquarters, Vol.5 (out of 6 volumes)" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

³² "German Telegraph #147" ["Telegraph File of Military Attaché to Germany" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

³³ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (6)" (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1973), pp.510-515

³⁴ The Military History Society of Japan, ed., "Confidential War Diary, Part 1" (Kinseisha, 1998), p.377

intercepting the transport between the U.S. and Australia as well as marine transport bound for India and Australia in East India.³⁵ However, German Navy focused mostly on blocking off logistics transport routes of expeditionary forces of the U.S. and U.K. Germany was dissatisfied because Japanese Navy seemed to pay little attention to this operation. Germany wanted the Japanese Navy to enhance this operation because destruction of the enemy's logistics routes is the common operation against the common enemies. However, the Japanese Navy only sank approximately 100,000 tons of the enemy's vessels in January–April 1943, significantly falling short of the volume Germany desired (200,000 to 300,000 tons a month). In mid-April, the Japanese Navy mainly deployed most of its submarines (out of 46 submarines in total) in the southeast areas and the west coast of Australia and only sent two submarines to Indian Ocean.³⁶ As the cooperative alliance among the Axis nations to knock down the U.K. was highly unlikely, Japan needed to set up its own strategies without expecting an alliance with German and Italy.

(3) Gaps between the “Outline” and actual operations

Due to the stalemate of offensive operations in the Pacific Ocean resulting from the Battle of Midway as well as more favorable war situations for Germany and Italy in North Africa, Japan started to review the “Outline” in July 1942. As for war conducts, the Navy put more emphasis on intensifying commerce destruction battles and drastically enhancing war preparations on the U.S. than on war preparations on Chongqing or Soviet Union, while the Army recognized the war against the U.S. should not be a decisive war and Japan should beat up the U.S. through the Axis alliance. However, since Germany and Italy would be unable to exert a force on West Asia or India in the immediate future, the Army called for knocking down the Chongqing government before beating up the U.K.³⁷ While the Army put emphasis on China in addition to the U.S. and U.K., the 14th Section, Office of the Army's General Staff, which was responsible for military administration affairs, gave an opposing opinion from the viewpoints of national capabilities, such as requisitioned ship available or steel production volume. In addition, at the Liaison Roundtable on September 10, the government staff reported the current commercial shipbuilding situations and actual steel production volume and emphasized limitations of the war conduct plan from the viewpoint of national capabilities, stating “because we are unable to meet the requests of war

³⁵ “Navy Directive #209, Attachment 2” [“Navy Directives File 3/9” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

³⁶ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (6),” pp.515-516

³⁷ On August 14, 1942, the Army Ministry leaders decided “No.51 Operation (Sichuan invasion operation)” and formed their consensus to report it to Emperor *Hirohito*.

conducts if nothing is done, related government organizations should immediately draft appropriate countermeasures...and put them into practice.”³⁸

During this period, as for war situations in Solomon Islands, as Japan failed to recapture Guadalcanal as mentioned earlier, the Army top commanders tended to put more emphasis on immediate operations than deciding war strategies. On September 16, after receiving a painful telegraph about the Kawaguchi squad’s failure of attacks on Guadalcanal, Sugiyama, Chief of the Office of the Army’s General Staff, ordered the army staff to prepare “No.5 Operation.”³⁹ On September 18, the Army and the Navy concluded the Army-Navy Central Agreement (the 8th revision) on operations in East New Guinea and Solomon Islands and renewed their determination to “recapture the airport in Guadalcanal by employing war capabilities in an integrated manner.”⁴⁰ During this period, some staff in the Imperial General Headquarters insisted that Japan should basically pursue unbeaten war strategies from both of war conduct and operation conduct perspectives. However, as a long-drawn-out war would not attain Japan’s war objectives, the Imperial General Headquarters decided to continue offensive operations (Guadalcanal Recapture Operation). On September 22, Tanabe, Deputy Chief of the Office of the Army’s General Staff, gave Koutani, Chief of the 15th Section (War Conducts) the following instructions on the Army’s war strategies.⁴¹

“It is still too early to evaluate the war situations. If we wait until the mid October, we will see our ways clearer. If you make a war strategy plan more detailed than our March 7 decision, it would take the guilt off the gingerbread. You may make any researches and make any considerations, but after all we will go on based on the March 7 plan.”

In this context, the “March 7 plan” means the aforementioned “Outline.” Since their optimistic outlook remained unchanged at this stage, he intended to effectively keep offensive operation strategy in the Pacific Ocean, that is, actively shaking off fire sparks in the southeast areas, as argued by the Navy until mid-October.

³⁸ The 20th Team (the 15th Section), Army General Staff Office, “Minutes of the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters, Vol.5 (out of 6 volumes)” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

³⁹ North China Area Army listed the Xi’an operation as “No.5 Operation” in FY1942 Cleanup Construction Plan so that it would be able to conduct it as necessary, but the army headquarters in Japan briefly called the Xi’an operation “No.50 Operation” and then Sichuan invasion operation “No.51 Operation.” Then, the operation for advancing to Sichuan at once was called “No.5 Operation.”

⁴⁰ “Army Directive #1275” [“Army Directive File, Vol.6” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

⁴¹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (5)” (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1973), p.107

On October 25, the 2nd Division finally failed to recapture Guadalcanal. In light of such situation, Hattori, Chief of the 2nd (Operations) Section, started arguing that Japan should concentrate on establishing unbeaten war capabilities and that, since active strategy would start two years later (1944), a higher priority should be put on drafting operation plans than war conduct strategies. The Military Affairs Bureau of the Army Ministry expressed its opinion “We disagree with your opinion because more emphasis on enhancing national war capabilities would lead to passive attitude. Japan should make efforts to take active measures if an opportunity arises, and we should leave untouched the path to Chongqing operations.” Tanaka, Director of the First Division, stated that Japan should make a breakthrough of war situations in the southeast areas and new strategy is unnecessary. After all, they decided to follow the March 7 “Outline” and stopped adopting a new war conduct strategy on October 30. The war strategy, which puts emphasis on an offensive stance to the westward and was examined for 4 months, finally did not turn into a new political/strategic guideline because of a change in war situations.⁴² In addition to deciding to suspend Northeast India Invasion Operation (“No. 21 Operation”) on October 3, the Imperial General Headquarters reported to Emperor *Hirohito* its intention to stop preparations for “No.5 Operation,” which aimed at knocking down the Chongqing government.⁴³

In line with the original plan to recapture Guadalcanal, Japan set up the 8th Area Army based in Rabaul on November 18,⁴⁴ while the Army-Navy cooperative strategy (the 9th Army-Navy Central Agreement) aimed at Army-Navy cooperative aviation operations by employing the area army consisting of 2 land-based area armies and an air division. However, as its operation objective was “capturing key areas in Solomon Islands and New Guinea to gain an advantage in South Pacific Ocean,”⁴⁵ which was rather vague strategic concept, it suggested that the Army and the Navy both recognized that they were unable to recapture Guadalcanal in real terms. In this way, the Imperial Conference officially decided withdrawal from Guadalcanal on December 31. As for actual operations in the main battle field Pacific Ocean, Japan threw up offensive operations to intercept the transport between the U.S. and Australia, and started to take passive attitudes totally different from the purposes of the “Outline.”

At the Imperial Conference on February 27, 1943, when Premier Tojo asked the question, “I found it necessary to reconsider our present strategy ‘war strategy to knock down the U.K.’

⁴² War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (5),” p.139

⁴³ “No.5 Operation Document Materials File” (War History Office, National Defense College) <Ishiwari File 50>

⁴⁴ “Army Order #714,” “Imperial General Headquarters Army Section” Army Order and Army Directive Collection 7, 1942” (MT Shuppan, 1994), pp.122-124

⁴⁵ “Army Directive #1338” [“Army Directive File, Vol.7” (War History Office, National Defense College)]; “Operation-related important document file, Vol.2” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

What do you think about it?" Ito, Deputy Chief of the Naval General Staff, answered, "I also think it necessary to change our present war strategies in some manners." Conference participants also formed an overall consensus, "It is very difficult to beat up the U.K. if Germany does not land the U.K. mainland. As Germany is unlikely to conduct such operation today, Japan needs to reconsider its traditional war strategy to knock down the U.K."⁴⁶ However, since this consensus did not result in quick reconsideration of the Imperial General Headquarters' war strategy, military staff was busily engaged in operation strategies to make a breakthrough in war situations in the southeast areas.

- (4) Drafting up "FY1943 Imperial Army Comprehensive Operation Guidance Plan" and "Imperial Navy Third-Stage Operation Plan for the War"

Due to the strategic shift of withdrawal from Guadalcanal, Office of the Army's General Staff and Naval General Staff examined possible future operation plans and obtained the Emperor's *Hirohito* approval on "FY1943 Imperial Army Comprehensive Operation Guidance Plan"⁴⁷ for the Army and "Imperial Navy Third-Stage Operation Plan for the War"⁴⁸ for the Navy. The Navy drafted up this plan by revising its second-stage plan of April 1942 in line with changes in war situations, while it was the first time for the Army to develop a comprehensive operation plan for the overall army. To carry out operations from the overall viewpoint, the Army's plan was valuable as a substitute for the "Outline."

The Army's operation objective was "enhancing national defense for victory" and defeating the enemies to "eliminate fighting spirits of enemy nations" and at the same time to "prevent a war against Soviet Union" in order to carry through the Great East Asia War. In addition, Japan's operation strategies include (1) quickly gaining strategic advantages in the southeast areas to prepare for subsequent operations and (2) securing stability in currently occupied areas in the south and in China and anticipating active operations on the northeast India by taking advantages. However, these plans did not have activeness as seen in the "Draft Proposal" prepared in the pre-war era, and the offensive fighting spirit for conducting operations as seen until mid-1942 also seemed to have disappeared. It was like missing the timing of the

⁴⁶ The 20th Team (the 15th Section), Army General Staff Office "Minutes of the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters, Vol.6 (out of 6 volumes)" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁴⁷ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (6)," pp.183-215

⁴⁸ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (4)" (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1973), pp.35-50

decisive match to gain initiatives in this war.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the Navy's operation objectives were "destroying the enemy's fleets and air forces coming over to East Asian sea," "destroying enemy's marine transport routes," and "quickly enhancing national defense for victory" in order to "eliminate enemy's fighting spirits." To this end, the Navy mainly put emphasis on (1) securing victories in aerial battles and (2) carrying out surprise attacks to destroy enemy's fleets at front line strongholds.⁵⁰ In other words, by taking a backward stem from initial offensive operations in the Pacific Ocean, the Navy aimed at securing victories in aerial battles and gradually reducing the U.S. fleets through surprise attacks in order to quickly regain initiatives in operations. In this way, these two plans gave up almost all active offensive strategies as seen in the "Outline" of last March. The Army and the Navy both recognized the Southeast areas as the main battlefield and intended to keep the areas west of Lae-Salamaua and north of the central part of Solomon Islands.

In line with this concept, the Operation Sections of the Army and Navy engaged in joint research project on southeast area's possible operation strategies in mid-March. The Army found it more advantageous to retreat front lines (to the line from northwest portion of New Guinea to Timor) because defensive front lines would be cut by half from 10,000 km to 5,000 km long, while the Navy opposed the Army's plan, strongly insisting on the possible disadvantages of retreating the front lines due to risks of getting intercepted from the south areas.⁵¹ Finally, they confirmed that they would not give up eastern part of New Guinea, and reached a conclusion that the Army and the Navy would shift their focus to New Guinea and enhance their air battle capabilities to quickly establish strategic advantages in this area.⁵² However, their research program only covered the southeast areas, rather than the overall war areas from Kurile Islands in the north to Indian Ocean to the west, as examined on a later date. In this sense, they only researched possible operation strategies to address the war situations at the time. Then, "Southeast Area Operations Army-Navy Central Agreement," which was put in statutory form on a later date, had vague operation objectives, stating Japan should "attack and secure key areas in the southeast areas to establish stronger strategic advantages,"⁵³ suggesting that the Army and the Navy faced difficulties in setting up specific targets in their military operations.

After that, the Combined Fleet spontaneously sent a majority of carrier-borne aircrafts of its core fleet (the 3rd Fleet) to the southeast areas and carried through an aerial invasion operation

⁴⁹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (5)," p.600

⁵⁰ "Navy Directive #209" ["Navy Directives File 3/9" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

⁵¹ "Diary of Lt. General Joichiro Sanada, No.12" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁵² War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (6)," p.257

⁵³ "Southeast Area Operations Army-Navy Central Agreement ("Navy Directive #213," separate volume)" ["Navy Directives File 4/9" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

called the “I” Operation in mid-April, which aimed at destroying the allied nations’ air battle capabilities in Solomon Islands and New Guinea in a tie-up with air units stationed at Japanese local bases. The aforementioned “Southeast Area Operations Army-Navy Central Agreement” gave instructions to “make efforts to employ Army’s and Navy’s air battle capabilities in an integrated manner in the case of guiding air operations.” At that time, Sugiyama, Chief of the Office of the Army’s General Staff, also thought about unifying the chain of order for air units in the southeast areas. When he made reports to Emperor *Hirohito* in early April, Emperor *Hirohito* said to him, “I heard the Navy would conduct an operation on Solomon Islands and Port Moresby, but how about the Army?”⁵⁴ which implicitly suggested a possible collaboration on the air units between the Army and the Navy. However, the air units in the Army probably did not have enough war capabilities to contribute to yielding satisfactory outcomes in the “I” Operation in a tie-up with the Navy.

3. A strategy shift due to rapidly deteriorated war situations in the Pacific Ocean

(1) Gap in the Army’s argument and the Navy’s arguments in terms of possible front line retreat

In spring 1943, the Army needed to address enemy’s counterattacks from west and east, such as actions on enemy’s counterattacks in the southeast areas, in particular, on air bases in eastern New Guinea, Burma recapture operations resulting from enhanced war capabilities in Indian Ocean due to fall of Tunis, and defense in northeast areas after audacious attacks of Attu’s garrison force. Sanada, Chief of the Army’s 2nd Section, was acutely aware that “We saw withdrawal from Guadalcanal, and we are now seeing a fall of Attu. We also have no choice but to withdraw from Kiska. Serious research is absolutely necessary to identify how we should, with real confidence, guide operations from the viewpoints of war conducts and operation guidance and how we should end the war with glorious outcomes.”⁵⁵ On the other hand, the Navy became very frustrated because a gap in maritime and air war capabilities between Japan and the U.S. got larger over time, posing more difficulty in identifying an opportunity to gradually decrease enemy’s war capabilities. In the Imperial General Headquarters, the Army and the Navy both needed in-depth research on how to guide the overall war situation in the future.

Shortly after that, on June 30, the allied forces unexpectedly launched their landing operations on Nassau Bay (20 km south of Salamaua) and Rendova Island (central Solomon) at

⁵⁴ Yuji Nakao, ed., “Emperor Showa Statements Collection, Part 2” (Fuyo Shobo, 2003), p.200

⁵⁵ “Abstract of Diary of Lt. General Sanada, Vol.1” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

the same time, and also invaded New Georgia Island on the opposite shore of Rendova Island on July 5. On August 5, when Sugiyama, Chief of the Office of the Army's General Staff, frankly reported the military disadvantages in the central Solomon to Emperor *Hirohito*, Emperor *Hirohito* said to him, "If Japan gradually loses ground in that way, it would pose significant impacts on third nations. Where on earth are you intending to launch a decisive match?"⁵⁶ As for operations in the southeast areas, a new stage started because a new central agreement that included withdrawal from the central Solomon on August 13⁵⁷ and withdrawal from Lae-Salamaua on August 30⁵⁸ became effective, while the Navy finally became interested in defense line retreat plan in the Pacific Ocean as argued by the Army so far. However, there was a significant gap in the opinions between the Army and the Navy even with a number of discussions between them because the Army called for putting higher priority on keeping an appropriate distance from enemies to enhance backward defense, while the Navy insisted that front line retreat would mean giving up opportunities for victory and called for enhancing the front lines. On August 24, when both Chiefs of Staff informally reported to Emperor *Hirohito* about operations in the southeast areas, the Army side said it would put emphasis on enhancing backward important lines, while the Navy side reported it would focus on the current front lines by keeping the front lines in Rabaul and Truk Islands as much as possible. On September 15, when they again reported the overall operations to Emperor *Hirohito*, there still remained a fundamental gap in the opinions between the Army and the Navy. Sugiyama, Chief of the Office of the Army's General Staff, emphasized the enhancement of backward important lines, saying, "Japan should keep the currently occupied areas as much as possible to quickly establish appropriate defense from Banda Sea to Caroline Islands and improve Japan's counterattack capabilities." On the other hand, Nagano, Chief of the Naval General Staff, made almost the same statements as the Army, saying "We are waiting for accumulating our counterattack capabilities by enhancing defense of backward important lines," but he also explained the necessity of front line-based decisive match, stating "As the Navy regards Marshall and Gilbert as very advantageous battlefields, we intend to keep these areas as much as possible."⁵⁹

Prior to this, the Combined Fleet launched the interception operation guideline (the "Z Operation" guideline⁶⁰ based on the 3rd-stage operation guideline and the aforementioned plans

⁵⁶ "Abstract of Diary of Lt. General Sanada, Vol.2" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁵⁷ "Navy Directive #267" ["Navy Directives File 4/9" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

⁵⁸ "Army Directive #1603" ["Army Directives File, Vol.8" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

⁵⁹ "Operation-related important document file, Vol.3" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁶⁰ If enemy fleet's invasion units make invasive attacks in the Pacific Ocean, the Combined Fleet would make all-out efforts to intercept and beat up the enemy by using all of its armed forces in the Pacific Ocean. This is called "Z Operation." In the Combined Fleet, the defense zones in outer important areas, as traditionally discussed at the Imperial General Headquarters,

on August 15.⁶¹ This guideline assumes Truk Islands and Rabaul as the baseline, calls for making a sally from the baseline to defend from enemy's invasion, and plans a decisive match in Marshall, Gilbert and Solomon in the central south Pacific Ocean. In this way, without forming a full consensus on their fundamental ideas, the Army and the Navy supposedly compiled "Operation Guideline for Future," which was approved at the research session before Emperor *Hirohito* on September 23.

(2) Shift to defensive strategy: Deciding on "the Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War" for the second time

After the Imperial General Headquarters Army and Navy Sections pushed ahead with comprehensive research on possible political and strategic approaches in parallel with drafting a new operation strategy, the government and the Imperial General Headquarters held a "Liaison Conference" on September 25 and requested the Imperial Conference meeting on war conducts on September 30 to adopt "the Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War" (hereinafter, referred to as the "New Outline") and obtain an approval from Emperor *Hirohito*. The New Outline states the principles and guidelines as follows.⁶²

Principles

1. The Empire plans to take decisive actions on the overall war situations this year or the next year, daunt offensive intentions of the enemies the U.S. and U.K., quickly take strategic actions surely leading to victory and rapidly enhance decisive war capabilities, in particular, air battle capabilities to carry through the war against the U.S. and U.K. at advantages on our side.
2. The Empire will have a closer alliance with Germany to carry through a collaborative war and make joint efforts with Germany to improve the relationships with Soviet Union.
3. The Empire will immediately prepare for decisive match at home and enhance solidarity in Great East Asia.

were called "interception zone." By the way, the decisive match concept in the Indian Ocean from Bengal Bay to Sumatra, Java, and southeast Timor ("Y Operation Guideline") was launched as a military order on September 25, 1943.

⁶¹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (4)," pp.437-472

⁶² "The Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War"["Decisions File of the Liaison Conference between the Government and Imperial General Headquarters, Vol.8" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

Guidelines

1. The Empire will make all-out efforts to enhance strategic advantages around in 1944 to address the invasion of the U.S. and U.K., while identifying and destroying enemy's counterattack capabilities as necessary.

For the purpose of carrying through the war, the Empire shall absolutely defend the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean areas, including Kurile Islands, Ogasawara Islands, inner South Sea areas (the central and western portions) and western "New Guinea," "Sunda," and "Burma."

Throughout the war, the Empire shall secure maritime transports within this zone.

2. Toward the Soviet Union, the Empire shall prevent the Soviet Union from raging a war against Japan as much as possible, make efforts to improve the diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and strive to suggest peace between Germany and the Soviet Union if such an opportunity arises.
3. Toward the Chongqing government, the Empire shall ceaselessly keep putting strong pressure, particularly prevent air raids from mainland China and maritime transport blockage and strive to quickly solve the China issues as soon as such an opportunity arises.

The new strategies, as expressed in this way, represents a significant shift to defensive strategy to prevent enemy's counterattacks at the so-called the "Absolute Defensive Line," including Mariana and Caroline Islands in inner South Sea Islands until Japan gets prepared for counterattack capabilities, including air battle capabilities that would play important roles in the decisive battle. The new strategy also expresses the two nations "the U.S. and U.K." as main enemies. However, since it does not describe any action for knocking down the U.K. as seen in the "Draft Proposal" in the pre-war period and the previous "Outline," the Army and the Navy recognized the U.S. as the only enemy for Japan in this new "Outline." Under such understanding, it was natural that Japan intended not to take new active measures on the Soviet Union or China.

In this context, the problem is, as clearly suggested in their review process so far, that basic principles of the "New Outline" were formed without eliminating a gap in operation concepts in the Pacific Ocean between the Army and the Navy. The Army insisted "backward areas (backward important areas, i.e., Mariana to Caroline Islands) are important," while the Navy argued "the front lines (front important areas, i.e., Marshall Islands) are important." The expressions of the "New Outline" incorporated the Army's argument to put emphasis on "backward areas." At the "Liaison Conference" on September 25 to discuss this new outline, when Nagano, Chief of Naval

General Staff Office, asked a question why Marshall Islands were not incorporated in the Absolute Defensive Line, Sato, the organizer of the conference and Director-General of Military Affairs Bureau of the Army Ministry, explained, “Marshall Islands sticks out too much and look like a sharp convex, so we exclude them from the Absolute Defense Line and recognize them as the front line.” In addition, in response to the Navy’s argument that it would make counterattacks close out the matchup if enemy’s fleet shows up in Marshall Islands, he said, “we regard Marshall Islands as front line, but we do not mean to deny the Combined Fleet’s making a sally. If enemy shows up at a front line, it is often seen that the main forces would make counterattacks from the front line. The Army, of course, would like the Combined Fleet to make such counterattacks.”⁶³ In other words, the Army supposedly designated “absolutely necessary important areas,” but as seen in Paragraph 1 of the “Guidelines” section, there is no higher or lower priority between the Army’s argument to “enhance strategic advantages...to address invasion of the U.S. and U.K.” and the Navy’s argument “identifying and destroying enemy’s counterattack capabilities as necessary.” By doing so, the Army and the Navy finally have come to a compromise. “Central and South Pacific Ocean Area Operations Army-Navy Central Agreement,” as becoming effective on September 30, had a vague expression “when enemy makes inroads, Japan shall make counterattacks on the enemy by using our bases in the important areas as stated in the preceding paragraph (note: “Mariana,” “Caroline” Islands, and north Australia areas) and concentrating our various war capabilities, and shall destroy it as early as possible to dampen the enemy’s intention to make counterattacks.”⁶⁴ By doing so, the Army and the Navy managed to form a consensus.

Although Japan decided the “New Outline,” the newly-established Absolute Defense Line was almost unprotected, and new action would be necessary to restore strategic advantages. In addition, as a lot of soldiers of the Army and the Navy were deployed outside the Absolute Defense Line and were practically impossible to systematically withdraw inside the Absolute Defense Line due to a shortage of marine vessels, they were deployed for long drawn-out battles to gain time for enhancing defense of the Absolute Defense Line.⁶⁵ Furthermore, in terms of the invasion of strong the U.S. fleet on Marshall and Gilbert Islands anticipated in a short time, the Combined Fleet based in Truk Islands was expected to conduct an intercepting operation, but quick action was also necessary to beef up defense capabilities in front line islands scattering, such as the aforementioned islands and East Caroline Islands. In other words, the Imperial General

⁶³ Kenryo Sato, “Reminiscences of Great East Asia War” (Tokuma Shoten, 1966), p.254

⁶⁴ “Central and South Pacific Ocean Area Operations Army-Navy Central Agreement (“Army Directive #1652,” separate volume);” “Imperial General Headquarters Army Section’ Army Order and Army Directive Collection 8, 1943” (MT Shuppan, 1994), pp.245-254

⁶⁵ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (7)” (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1973), pp.292-294

Headquarters made all-out efforts to construct the Absolute Defense Line and take emergency measures on front line areas. However, as marine vessel shortage got more serious at that time, it was very difficult to enhance both the front lines and backward areas in parallel at the same time.⁶⁶

Since spring 1943, the Combined Fleet suffered from significant damages because it sent out career-based aircrafts to the “I” Operation and other military operations to address war situations in Solomon Islands and New Guinea. Mainstay force of the Combined Fleet was still in the process of getting rebuilt. However, the Combined Fleet anticipated the U.S. fleet’s invasion on Marshall Islands in a short time and pushed ahead with preparations for decisive match by sending its mainstay forces with willingness. Koga, who served as Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet after Admiral Yamamoto died, recognized it got less likely to win in the decisive battle with the U.S. fleet from the viewpoint of the current strength of the Combined Fleet, but he strongly believed the Combined Fleet should make efforts for early-stage decisive match as long as there was a slight chance to win such a battle.⁶⁷ On the other hand, due to withdrawal from Guadalcanal, subsequent difficulties in central Solomon and east New Guinea and audacious attacks in Attu Island, the Army undeniably started doubting the Navy’s positive outlooks.⁶⁸ The Army was concerned that if the Navy continues decisive match-like military operations and keep losing its war capabilities, Japan would not have air battle capabilities strong enough to destroy the U.S. troops coming near to the Absolute Defense Line. The Army also worried that the further loss of war capabilities due to operations in Marshall Islands would damp down counterattack capabilities in the Absolute Defense Line.

4. Doubts over new strategy due to allied forces’ full-scale counterattacks

(1) Allied forces’ two-direction counterattacks and the Combined Fleet’s countermeasures

Koga, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, made firm determination on a decisive match (Z Operation Guideline) in the front line sea areas of the Absolute Defense Line. On October 6, the U.S. mobile force exploited Japan’s patrol off guard and made sudden attacks on Wake Island north of Marshall Islands. After comprehensively analyzing related information on subsequent conditions, Koga saw a sign of the U.S. mobile force’s invasion on central Pacific or

⁶⁶ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (7),” p.210

⁶⁷ Shigeru Fukutome, “What the Navy should regret” (Nippon Shuppan, 1951), p.156

⁶⁸ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (4),” p.524

Honshu area and led the Combined Fleet's mainstay force to Brown area, but returned to Truk without gaining any useful information on the enemy. There was no decisive match, but the Combined Fleet suffered considerable loss in its war capabilities because it lost air battle capabilities on Wake Island and suffered a shortage of ship-use fuels in Truk Islands.⁶⁹ After that, when the U.S. troops attacked north Solomon Islands since late October, the Combined Fleet impetuously decided to send aircraft units and get off all carrier-borne aircrafts (First Carrier Division) of the 3rd Fleet, the core portion of decisive match battle capabilities, to air bases in the southeast areas, and in a tie-up with locally-stationed First Base Aviation Unit, conducted an operation to destroy the enemy's air/naval units invading to the southeast areas. This 2-weeks-long operation since late October is called the "Ro" Operation. However, as the operation coverage area was different from the original objectives due to rapid changes in the battle situations after launching the operation,⁷⁰ Japan suffered devastating damages by losing 121 carrier-based aircrafts (attrition rate: 70%), which were the decisive battle capabilities of the Combined Fleet, as well as 89 pilot pairs (attrition rate: 47%).⁷¹ In line with the "New Outline," Japan was supposed to set up a lot of air bases equipped with decisive battle capabilities, but the Army was not responsible for setting up air bases in central Pacific Ocean,⁷² so the air force in this area was dependent on how well the Navy could create appropriate air forces. However, as recovery from the aforementioned attrition took a long time, Japan needed to give up its decisive battle strategy in front lines because of war capability loss in the "Ro" Operation.

Judging that fiery air battles on north Solomon would have given significant damages to enemy, the Combined Fleet evaluated that the U.S. troops' invasion to central Pacific Ocean would get delayed substantially. Shortly after that, immediately after Japan's remaining air force withdrew to Truk Islands, the U.S. large aircrafts made severe air raids on Japan's air bases in Gilbert and Marshall areas. The U.S. troops started invasion into Gilbert Islands by sending many carrier-borne aircrafts on November 19, and then, landed Makin and Tarawa on November 21.

⁶⁹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: Central Pacific Ocean Area Naval Operations (2)" (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1973), pp.410-424

⁷⁰ The "Ro" Operation initially aimed to dispatching First Carrier Division's aircraft squadrons to cooperate with the 1st Base Air Unit, and by taking into consideration difficult battle conditions in Finschhafen area in East New Guinea; to give serious damages on the allied forces' maritime supply route in Buna and Dampier area in concert with Southeast Area unit's "Ho" Operation, which was conducted since mid-October, putting top priority on keeping Dampier Straits; to beat up air forces in these area; and to take advantages of such military outcomes to quickly send necessary supplies for sustaining front lines in the southeast areas. However, as the allied forces landed Tarokina in Bougainville Island (north Solomon Islands) on November 1, it looked like Bougainville Island defense operation as a result, and it was reported that the Navy dispatched First Carrier Division, making ambiguous the initial purposes of the operation.

⁷¹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: Southeast Area Naval Operations (3)" (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1976), pp.419-421

⁷² War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (7)," pp.286-315

Because Japan's carrier-borne aircrafts for decisive battle capabilities, were unusable due to damages in the "Ro" Operation, interception battle capabilities available for the Combined Fleet in addressing invasion of enemy's mobile forces were the 22nd Carrier Division (105 active aircrafts), which was deployed to Marshall Islands under the command of the Inner South Sea Area Unit (4th Fleet), and 9 submarines only.⁷³ The 22nd Carrier Division has lost its mainstay of its land-based attacking air corps in the First Gilbert Offshore Air Battle from November 21, and 57 or more aircrafts blew themselves or were unable to return out of the total 145 aircrafts participating in the battle up until December 3. Only 3 submarines returned to the base out of the submarines dispatched to block enemy's reinforcement logistics route to Gilbert area.⁷⁴ As suggested in these results, the military operation in Gilbert Islands, which was planned as a part of the Pacific Ocean Frontal Interception Operation (Z Operation Guideline), also had no opportunity to make decisive match with the U.S. fleet. By ordering "Operation C Third-Stage Conclusion" on December 4, Japan gave up its intention to destroy enemy's mobile forces. As the U.S. troops occupied Gilbert Islands, including Makin and Tarawa Islands, and could deploy its overwhelming battle capabilities to attack these islands, it was clear that the U.S. troops already had battle capabilities deployable to new independent operations in the central Pacific Ocean, in addition to its traditional operation lines (from Solomon Islands along with the north coast of New Guinea). In addition, capturing Gilbert Islands posed significant impact because these islands would serve as a foothold leading to Marshall and Mariana when destroying Japan's naval strongholds and as appropriate location for air bases for large aircrafts capable of air raids on Japan's homeland.

On the other hand, subsequent war situations in the central Pacific Ocean were rather calmer than in the southeast areas, and the number of the U.S. aircrafts that attacked the central Pacific Ocean stood at a half of that attacking the southeast areas.⁷⁵ In the meantime, as enemy's counterattacks on the southeast areas intensified, they were about to encompass Rabaul by bursting through Dampier Straits after landing the west portion of New Britain, landing Cape Gunbi in the east New Guinea, and making air raids on Rabaul. In early 1944, under such situations, by analyzing that enemy would make main counterattacks on the north coast of New Guinea (southeast area) and their attacks on Marshall Islands (the central Pacific Ocean) would be their secondary counterattacks, the Combined Fleet shifted its focus on the southeast areas that

⁷³ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (5)" (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1974), pp.137-138

⁷⁴ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (5)," pp.139-143

⁷⁵ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Navy Section and the Combined Fleet (5)," p.157

required urgent action. However, as the Combined Fleet had almost no air forces at that time, it could not strike a blow against stronger air forces of the U.S. and Australia. In addition, sea-based units were also able to “conduct their operations only in the Caroline sea area at best”⁷⁶ due to their limited oil storage amount and tankers available. Around late mid-January, the Combined Fleet, taking into consideration the fuel issue and the U.S. mobile force’s possible surprise attack on Truk, gave an instruction to relocate the fleet base to southeast, which suggests that Japan would probably find it impossible to carry through “Z Operation Guideline” in Marshall Islands at this stage.⁷⁷

(2) Impact of the first air raid on Taiwan by the U.S. air force stationed in China, and Army headquarters’ efforts to make a breakthrough in war situations

To carry through the operation strategies of the “New Outline,” the Army Section examined the possible diversion and deployment of armed force, and on November 8, 1943, concluded a MOU with the Navy Section in terms of dispatching army units.⁷⁸ To enhance the defense of central Pacific Ocean, this MOU is intended to send approximately 40 infantry battalions selected from homeland Japan, Korea, Manchuria, and China, and they were naturally supposed to get deployed to important locations within the Absolute Defense Line, such as Mariana or Caroline, according to the Army’s interpretation of the “New Outline.” However, the Navy, which intended to beat up enemies at Marshall Islands recognized as an advantageous decisive battlefield, also needed to enhance the defense of poorly-protected islands between Marshall and Caroline as support bases for naval battles. After having negotiations several times, the Army Section decided to deploy its armed forces, including South Sea squad, to these front line areas, as demanded by the Navy.

On November 25 on which the U.S. mobile force was attacking Gilbert Islands in central Pacific Ocean, the U.S. air force stationing in China sent 30 fighters and bombers to Taiwan in order to make surprise attack on Japanese Navy’s air base in Xinzhu. These aircrafts finished off their preparation in Suichuan air base (Jiangxi Province) on the night of November 24 and crossed Taiwan Straits by avoiding radar detection. This attack on Taiwan was the first time for homeland Japan to get attacked from mainland China, which set off shock waves to the Imperial General

⁷⁶ “Note of Nakazawa, Chief of G1 of the Naval General Staff” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁷⁷ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: Central Pacific Ocean Army Operations (1)” (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1967), pp.194-196

⁷⁸ “Operation-related important document file, Vol.3” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

Headquarters in a different way from the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo. To beef up aerial operations, the Army Section sent Kwantung Army's 12th Air Wing under the command of the top commander of China Expeditionary Army and ordered the South Area Army to cooperate in the air combat operations of China Expeditionary Army.⁷⁹ In addition, Sugiyama, Chief of the Office of the Army's General Staff told Hattori, Chief of the 2nd Section (again serving as Chief of the 2nd Section since October 1943), "It seems difficult to break down U.S. air force in mainland China...The enemy's air base seems to exist in Southeast China. Aren't we able to break down hydraulic jumps of the U.S. air force by connecting Canton-Hankow Railway from central or south China?" Hattori also had the same idea as Sugiyama and immediately ordered his fellow staff to research on specific approaches. Sanada, Director of the First Division, the Office of the Army's General Staff, (he advanced from Chief of the Army's 2nd Section to Director of First Division when Hattori was appointed as Chief of the 2nd Section) also felt necessity of keeping sufficient footholds in mainland China to carry through a long-term war in case of deteriorated war situations in the Pacific Ocean, based on his own study when serving as Chief of the Army's 2nd Section. In this way, the Army's operation leaders (Sugiyama, Sanada, and Hattori) made the concept of creating a corridor in mainland China ("Continent Cross-Through Operation.")⁸⁰ As a result, they decided to make the final study at "Tiger Military Simulation" at the end of December. This Cross-Through Operation seems to put top priority on yielding strategic outcomes, such as giving devastating blows to the mainstay of the Chongqing government and knocking down bases in Hengyang, Guilin, and Liuzhou as well as creating a corridor under Japanese influence in mainland China in the case that Japan would get pressurized from the Pacific Ocean in the future.⁸¹ On January 24, 1944, the Army Section ordered China Expeditionary Army to carry through "No.1 Operation" because it aimed at "Knocking down major bases of enemy's air forces in southwest China."⁸² The Imperial Japanese Headquarters took a bold course of launching a new offensive operation to improve war situations in mainland China where it had stayed passive so far.⁸³

⁷⁹ "Army Order #901" ["Army Orders File, Vol.12" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

⁸⁰ Continent Cross-Through means occupying and restoring the southern Beijing-Hankou Line from Xinxiang on the north bank of Hwang Ho to Hankou, the north Yuehan Line from Wuhan to Hengyang, and Xianggui Line from Hengyang to Liuzhou as well as newly constructing a railway from Liuzhou to Liangshan via Nanning. By doing so, Japan intended to consistently connect Korea, Manchuria, China, and Indochina with railways. Such cross-through operation was named "No.1 Operation."

⁸¹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (7)," pp.548-550

⁸² "Army Order #921" ["Army Orders File, Vol.12" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

⁸³ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: No.1 operation (1): Operations in Henan" (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1967), pp.34-39

After the aforementioned “No.5 Operation” was called off, China Expeditionary Army had been working on cleanup operations around occupied areas by actively launching land-based operations. When 7 divisions under the command of China Expeditionary Army were designated in April 1943 as armed units to get diverted to Manchuria in preparation for a war against Soviet Union,⁸⁴ China Expeditionary Army strived to actively attain their missions as much as possible by drafting their operation plans from the autumn and onward. However, in line with deciding the “New Outline,” the Imperial General Headquarters unofficially notified China Expeditionary Army of “pulling out 10 divisions” on October 7, which means ripping off a majority of China Expeditionary Army’s core forces. In other words, the Imperial General Headquarters intended to gradually divert 5 divisions to south areas (Pacific Ocean) around the end of 1943 and manage additional 5 divisions as reserve forces of the Imperial General Headquarters around the spring of 1944, suggesting the diversion of battle capabilities to the Pacific Ocean in accordance with Japan’s strategy shift to the “Absolute Defense Line” concept.

As for the aforementioned 5 divisions scheduled to be diverted to south areas, when examining the Continent Cross-Through Operation, on December 12, the Army Section told China Expeditionary Army about the 3rd Division (scheduled to get deployed to west New Guinea) and the 13th Division (scheduled to be sent to Mariana) saying, “We are currently working on examining when to divert these two divisions” and also confidentially notified Kwantung Army about “diverting 2 divisions of Kwantung Army to the south areas, in place of these two divisions.”⁸⁵ Although the diversion of these armed units southward is a urgent issue from the situations of the Absolute Defense Line, the Army decided to call off dispatching armed force in the process of planning the Continent Cross-Through Operation in mid December, two months later than its unofficial notification in early October, which suggests the Army did not seriously take war situations in the Pacific Ocean.⁸⁶ In fact, according to its outlook expressed in the “Tiger Military Simulation,” the Army estimated that Japan would sustain the Absolute Defense Line’s front line important areas by the end of 1944 and successfully carry through Imphal Operation in April 1944 at latest and Continent Cross-Through Operation in November 1944 at latest in Asia Continent, sustain the Absolute Defense Line in 1945 with some local offensive actions, and carry out sweeping attacks from north Australia and the Philippines in 1946

⁸⁴ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (7),” p.126

⁸⁵ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (8)” (Asagumo Simbunsha, 1974), pp.37-38

⁸⁶ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., “War History Series: Central Pacific Ocean Army Operations (1),” p.199

with the Army's overall forces.⁸⁷ These are way too optimistic perspectives. However, Hattori, who took initiatives on planning this military simulation, visited and saw war situations in Truk and Rabaul approximately a month earlier. In this sense, the Army did not intentionally make too optimistic outlooks as mentioned earlier for the purpose of this war simulation. The aforementioned outlook was probably derived from his judgment that Japan would be able to sustain the front lines in 1944.

As the Continent Cross-Through Operation was carried out in this way under the concept of the Absolute Defense Line, the Army sent its armed forces to the central Pacific front lines, such as Marshall Islands, almost as scheduled from the end of 1943 to March 1944, but it did not dispatch armed units to west Mariana or West Caroline Islands in inner South Sea Islands to which the Army should have sent its armed forces quickly during the same period. A lot of army units, including the 13th Division, were not dispatched as scheduled or were diverted to other areas. The Army conducted the Continent Cross-Through Operation by putting off deploying armed units to strategically important areas within the Absolute Defense Area, such as Mariana or Caroline, but the author could not understand whether the Army leaders at that time did make such a decision simply based on a way too optimistic outlook or some other factors.

(3) Japan lost the initiative in military operations in central Pacific areas

On January 30, 1944, the U.S. mobile forces made a raid on Marshall Islands and destroyed most of the locally-stationed Japanese navy air force through 2-day air raids. In addition to a guard unit under the control of the naval base, an army unit was also stationed on the islands. However, they were just deployed to different islands and did not get ready for defense.⁸⁸ When the U.S. troop started landing from February 1, local armed units made counterattacks but almost watched helplessly, and were recognized as having made suicide charges in Roi Atoll Island on February 3 and Kwajalein Island on February 5. As the situations of the enemy got revealed, the Combined Fleet recognized that active operations would be impossible and decided to call off all its planned operations, finally failing to start its interception operations.⁸⁹ In this situation, when asked a question by Emperor *Hirohito*, Sugiyama, Chief of the Office of the Army's General Staff, answered Emperor *Hirohito*, "We initially planned to put off sending our troops to Mariana,

⁸⁷ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (7)," pp.590-593

⁸⁸ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: Central Pacific Ocean Army Operations (1)," pp.214-217 and pp.221-237

⁸⁹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: Central Pacific Ocean Navy Operations (2)," pp.590-609

Ogasawara and Iwo Island, but we will give a higher priority and will do it as quick as possible from now on.”⁹⁰ Koga, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, said “It is a pity that our operations in Marshall Islands went unsuccessful. It was wrong to send the 1st and 2nd Carrier Divisions to the southeast area,”⁹¹ acknowledging that the navy’s current operations as well as the navy’s continuing to send its air forces to the southeast areas were a failure. Judging that the air raids on Truk got more likely, he left Truk for homeland Japan on February 10, and then, other naval vessels also withdrew from Truk, heading for Palau or homeland Japan. The Navy’s interception operation plan at the front lines already became unrealistic only 5 months after the “New Outline” was decided. After that, the Combined Fleet had no choice but to amend its strategy with focus on operations in backward important areas, such as Mariana and Caroline where almost no army units were yet deployed. For the Army, the outlook that Japan would be able to sustain the front line important areas at least for a year after the “New Outline” also crumbled like cookies, and it faced risk of the enemy’s invasion before getting ready for counterattacks at the Absolute Defense Line. At last, the enemy took the entire initiative over Japan in terms of military operations.

The U.S. mobile forces that busted through Japan’s defense line in Marshall Islands attacked Truk Islands, the strategic point of the Absolute Defense Line, on February 17. As the chain of command in Truk Islands was complicated after the withdrawal of the Combined Fleet, local operations did not go smoothly in a systematic manner.⁹² In addition, as interception capabilities immediately after the withdrawal of the Combined Fleet were insufficient, damages from the U.S. air raids got expanded, bringing about a loss of approximately 180 aircrafts.⁹³ The Navy Section made a request to the Army Section, saying “the navy will immediately send the 1st Air Fleet⁹⁴ to Mariana and divert most of aircrafts in the southeast (Rabaul) and the southwest areas to Truk. In addition, as we will concentrate on enhancing the defense of Wake, Marcus, and Mariana Islands, we would like the Army to put a higher priority on defense of Mariana, Marcus and Ogasawara.” They had some gaps in their opinions on the necessity of keeping Truk and possibility of defense, but anyway, Operations Sections of the Army and the Navy found it

⁹⁰ “Diary of Lt. General Joichiro Sanada, No.26” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁹¹ “Note of Nakazawa, Director of the First Division of the Naval General Staff: Operation Reference Dara No.3” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁹² “Great East Asia War Strategies after Outbreak of War” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁹³ “Note of Nakazawa, Director of the First Division of the Naval General Staff: War Situations Vol.3” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁹⁴ On February 1, the Navy Section delivered an order “Navy Order #27” to gradually send the 1st Air Fleet since the mid February 1944, which consisted of air base’s air forces that has been trained and get prepared since July 1943 under direct control of the Imperial General Headquarters, to inner South Sea and the Philippines areas and make it wait there in order for the fleet to cooperate in operations of the Combined Fleet.

necessary to keep Truk and Mariana areas and agreed that they needed to quickly send soldiers to these areas in the Absolute Defense Line.⁹⁵ As they pushed ahead with rapidly enhancing defense in the central Pacific Ocean, the Army Section newly set up the 31st Army Headquarters, which takes control over army units deployed to these areas but is under the command of locally-stationed navy commander,⁹⁶ while the Navy Section also set up an intermediate headquarters (Central Pacific Area Fleet Headquarters) between the existing 4th Fleet and the Combined Fleet.⁹⁷

The Combined Fleet that advanced from Truk to Palau entirely amended its existing Third-stage Operation Order and launched new “Z Operation Guideline.”⁹⁸ This guideline was designed to cope with changes in situations, because the Navy changed its main operational front from the southeast areas to the central Pacific areas, intended to intercept the enemies at Mariana and Caroline, except for Marshall Islands and Gilbert Islands already under the enemy’s control, and relocated the operation stronghold from Truk to Palau. In addition, when the enemy makes attacks, the Navy was supposed to intercept the enemy’s invading forces by using the mainstay of air force. In this process, the Navy recognized carrier-borne aircrafts and air base’s air forces as decisive match capabilities, and put more emphasis on enemy’s aircraft carriers and sea convoys as their attack targets. When addressing enemy’s landing forces, the guideline called for beating up the enemy as much as possible at first and then eliminating the enemy immediately before their landing points or at water’s edge in order to keep important areas. In this sense, the interception operation concept was basically based on island defense, which is totally different from traditional operation strategies. However, as Japan significantly lost war capabilities due to a series of sea and air battles, in particular, as Japan’s aircraft carriers and carrier-borne aircrafts had obviously got weaker, Japan needed to depend on its air forces in air bases in islands. This guideline is not a new operation strategy that Japan has spontaneously drafted up.

⁹⁵ “Diary of Lt. General Joichiro Sanada, No.27” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

⁹⁶ “Army Order #953” [“Army Orders File, Vol.13” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]; and “Army-Navy Central Agreement on Central Pacific Area Operations (Army Order #1882, Separate volume),” “Imperial General Headquarters Army Section Army Order and Army Directive Collection 9, 1944” (MT Shuppan, 1994), pp.372-375

⁹⁷ “Navy Directive #341” [“Navy Directives File 6/9” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

⁹⁸ “Combined Fleet Orders File” (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)

Conclusion - Japan's incoherent strategies on the U.S. -

The "New Outline" is meaningful because while Japan kept offensive strategies from the outbreak of war to the second-stage operations but faced a sign of failure of collaboration among the Axis nations westward and also suffered from unsuccessful continuous offensive operations in the Pacific Ocean, the New Outline created the way for Japan to set up the Absolute Defense Line, which aimed at addressing the allied force's counterattacks and restoring strategic advantages. However, there was a significant gap in strategic priorities between the Army and the Navy because the former put emphasis on constructing the Absolute Defense Line for future days, while the latter sought for an opportunity for a decisive match at front lines. Due to this internal gap, Japan missed an appropriate timing and locations to address the counterattacks of the allied forces. During this period, the Navy continued military operations to restore military advantages in sea and air battles and lost its battle capabilities because of losing a lot of aircraft carriers and carrier-borne aircrafts. On the other hand, the Army, which blindly believed that the Navy was keeping military advantages, had come to intend to improve war situations in China and Burma by putting off its plan of defense at the Absolute Defense Line. As a result of such operations, the construction of the Absolute Defense Line got delayed significantly. As the Combined Fleet's new operation guideline called for retreat of the interception zone since March 1944, the Navy's plan ironically came into line with the Absolute Defense Line concept, but it was too late.

Why did Japan face such situations? It is because the Army and the Navy failed to use their battle capabilities in an integrated and concentrated manner in the Pacific Ocean, the battlefield with the U.S. as the main enemy. The concept in the pre-war period that the Navy was mainly in charge of military operations in the Pacific Ocean has gradually been amended since the late 1942 when Japan started facing stalemates in its offensive strategies. However, the Army kept avoiding active interventions into military operations in the Pacific Ocean, and the Navy also generally did not want the Army to get involved with naval operations. A sort of "sense of territoriality" prevented the Army from advancing to the Pacific Ocean and also delayed appropriate chains of command for the defense of occupied islands as well as coherent logistics and transportation. However, when Mariana and Caroline Islands, the key locations in the Absolute Defense Line, became the front line due to losing Marshall Islands, Japan finally set up new army-navy headquarters with an integrated chain of command in the central Pacific Ocean in which the navy commander served as top commander. The Army and the Navy made all-out transportation

efforts,⁹⁹ and after advancing through rapid transportation, they defended occupied islands in accordance with the island defense manual, which was prepared by the Army in the fall 1943.¹⁰⁰ However, as army soldiers were trained mainly for offensive operations in mainland China, and because naval garrison forces were not experts of ground battles, it was not easy to enhance island defense by quickly getting across the concept of beating up enemies at the water's edge.

The Army's air units did not yield military achievements so much in sea battles mainly because this "sense of territoriality" prevented integration or unified command chain of army air units and naval air units. However, the Army's air units were naturally able to get involved in very limited operations in the Pacific Ocean because they had gaps in operation concepts and capabilities with the Navy. Even so, Japan started sending the Army's air forces to New Guinea areas in September 1942.¹⁰¹ When it became clear that Japan's naval air forces were losing battles in central Pacific Ocean particularly in a series of air battles on Gilbert and Marshall Islands, the Combined Fleet made a request to incorporate army air forces under its command.¹⁰² This request did not come true, but the Army, which already found that antishipping strike capabilities would be necessary, decided to provide torpedo attack training for its air forces, and the Navy also make active cooperation in such training.¹⁰³ However, such efforts did not yield results in time for military operations in the Absolute Defense Line.

Next, the limited availability and inaccuracy of information between the Army and the Navy also posed negative impacts on military operation information or future outlook. Since the outbreak of the war, information on lost battles was concealed within the Army or the Navy. In addition, lower-ranked unit delivered information on lost battles as an unbeaten battle to their

⁹⁹ Despite efforts of Maritime Guard General Headquarters established on November 15, 1943, damages on vessels have been sharply increasing since the end of 1943. As the plan called "Pine Transport" program was prepared to dispatch a lot of army/naval units and rapidly transport military supplies in order to quickly enhance defense in central Pacific Ocean areas, the Army and the Navy took thoroughgoing efforts on this program, such as increasing air units or marine vessels under the command of Maritime Guard Commander-in-Chief.

¹⁰⁰ The Army Section had been sending combat lesson collection teams or trench-making guidance teams to the central Pacific Ocean areas since the spring 1943. Based on these document materials, the Army Section prepared and delivered "Defense of Coral Islands (First draft)" on October 1, 1943. In addition, it also issued "Island Garrison Force's Combat Lessons (draft)" on November 15 under the name of assistant chief of education commissioner's office. This document systematically describes the headquarters' basic concepts of defense from enemy's landing. According to this document, since landing forces are most vulnerable when they are at sea or water's edge, army units should beat up enemies at water's edge by directly putting sea obstacles at water's edge so that they would be able to make the most of these obstacles.

¹⁰¹ War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (4)," pp.535-536; War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (5)," pp.350-356; and War History Office, National Defense College, ed., "War History Series: the Imperial General Headquarters Army Section (6)," pp.289-291; etc.

¹⁰² "Requests and Messages to the Headquarters" [Wartime-Organized Unit's Requests File, Part 2(1)] (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

¹⁰³ "Memorandum on Army Aircraft Torpedo Attack Training, 1944" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies); and "Navy Directive #328" ["Navy Directives File 5/9" (Military Archives, the National Institute for Defense Studies)]

upper-ranked unit in many cases. These cases were frequently seen in ground battles or sea battles for capturing islands in the southeast areas. The Army set up a new system to collect, sort out and deliver documents on combat lessons after June 1943 when it reported the U.S. troop's tactics in Attu, but it did not necessarily solve the problems of information accuracy and information quick delivery.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, it must be emphasized that inaccurate information posed a serious problem because it brought about way too optimistic outlooks. In particular, as the Navy's military achievements in the Pacific Ocean were overly valued, the Army wrongfully recognized that Japan took a lead in the war and often made mistakes in their outlooks as mentioned earlier. In particular, because the Army made an optimistic judgment that they would be able to prevent enemy's counterattacks at the front lines, such as Marshall Islands, for upcoming 1 year at shortest in the military simulation at the end of 1943, the Army conducted a large-scale military operation in mainland China, which was the largest operation since the China Incident, by sending more than 400,000 soldiers in 1944. Such operation strategy of the Army would probably have resulted in a failure of defense strategy of the Absolute Defense Line.

As the Allied Forces intensified their counterattacks, Japan shifted away from its passive attitude to the Soviet Union until then and started taking active measures to willingly improve the relationship with the Soviet Union, hoping for peacemaking between Germany and the Soviet Union. The "New Outline" also recognized the German-Soviet peacemaking as a diplomatic policy for supplement the Absolute Defense Line strategy. However, the Soviet Union cared nothing about peacemaking with Germany. During this period, Germany consistently requested Japan to raise a war on the Soviet Union. In addition, because the soldiers of Kwantung Army were sent to the Pacific Ocean, which started compromising the military balance at front line against the Soviet Union, there were almost no factor that would improve the relationships between Japan and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it was difficult at that time to evaluate whether or not "Japan-China Alliance Pact,"¹⁰⁵ which the Japanese government entered into with the Nanjing Nationalist Chinese government immediately after deciding on the "New Outline," or "Joint Declaration of the Greater East Asia Conference,"¹⁰⁶ which Premier Tojo delivered at the Greater East Asia Conference held immediately after the Japan-China Alliance Treaty, would provide better outlook for ending the war.

In terms of war situations in the spring 1944, as Japan did not put any direct expectations on Germany, the probability of the Axis nations' alliance to beat up the U.K. virtually disappeared.

¹⁰⁴ Akio Shirai, "Study on Imperial Japanese Army's 'Combat Lessons'" (Fuyo Shobo, 2003), pp16-23

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ed., "Japan's Diplomatic Documents and Main Documents: 1840-1945 (Part 2)" (Hara Shobo, 1965), pp.591-593

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pp.593-594

“No.1 Operation,” which had just started in mainland China in April, would yield outcomes in the next year at earliest. In addition, Japan faced stalemate in politically beating up the Chongqing government. Unless an effective peace talk counterpart showed up, Japan had no choice but sticking to operation strategy on its main enemy the U.S. However, the Navy almost lost its battle capabilities to confront the U.S. troops, while the Army had just started making genuine efforts to fight with the U.S. troops.