

The Japanese Termination of War in WW II: The Significance and Causal Factors of “The End of War”

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In World War II, the principle of unconditional surrender declared in January 1943 at the Casablanca Conference made the termination of the war far more difficult. Indeed, Germany kept on fighting until Berlin fell and truly had to surrender unconditionally. In contrast, Japan laid down its arms by accepting the Potsdam Declaration before the “Decisive Battle for the Home Islands” began.

As epitomized by the title of a Japanese TV program, “The End of War: Why Couldn’t It Have Been Decided Earlier” (NHK special, aired on August 15, 2012), previous studies in Japan have mainly focused on the analysis of the causes that delayed its surrender, even after Japan was clearly militarily defeated. Analysts have attributed the delay to political leaders’ belief that a more favorable peace could be attained if the enemy could be dealt one final blow, or to political leaders’ expectations of Soviet mediation, as well as to problems with Japan’s political system. There is heated debate to this day on whether the primary cause that led to the termination of the war was the dropping of the atomic bombs, the Soviet Union’s entry into the war, or both.¹

In order to address the question of why Japan followed a course quite different from Germany’s towards the termination of its war, this paper shall examine the background and factors that brought about Japan’s political surrender, while taking into consideration recent studies. It analyzes: 1) Japan’s war objectives; 2) Japan-U.S. relations; and 3) the military factor, specifically, the gap between Japanese and American perceptions on an American invasion of the Japanese Home Islands.

1. Japan’s War Objectives

The Imperial Conference that was convened on June 8, 1945 approved the “Basic Policy for the Future Direction of the War.” The Japanese Army’s original draft reflected its hardline theory of resisting to the very end, stating that, “The Japanese Empire will prosecute the war to the end in order to preserve the national polity and protect the imperial land, and thereby secure the foundations for the further development of the race.”²

The Basic Policy that was adopted read as follows: “With the belief in giving seven lives

¹ For an overview of the studies on the end of the war, see, for example, “Introduction” in Tamon Suzuki, *“Shusen” no Seijishi 1943-1945* [The Political History of the End of War 1943-1945] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2011). For an introduction of the discussion on the atomic bombings and the end of the war, see Michael Kort (Sadao Asada, trans.), “Hiroshima to Rekishika: Shusei Shugi no Kobo” [Historians and Hiroshima: The Rise and Fall of Revisionism], *Doshisha Hogaku* [The Doshisha Law Review], Vol. 60, No. 6 (January 2009).

² Jun Eto, Ken Kurihara, and Sumio Hatano, eds., *Shusen Kosaku no Kiroku (Ge)* [The Records of the Engineering of the Termination of the War (Part II)] (Tokyo: Kodansha Bunko, 1986) pp. 140-141.

for the country as its inspiration and based on the strength of its advantageous geographical position and the unity of its people, the Japanese Empire will prosecute the war to the end in order to preserve the national polity and defend the imperial land, and thereby, accomplish the objective of the military expedition.”³ The first half took into account domestic considerations for the upcoming convocation of the Imperial Diet session, while bearing in mind the wishes of the Army. Nevertheless, the Basic Policy was undeniably a major disappointment for peace advocates.

As a compromise measure, the Cabinet inserted the following clause into the Basic Policy: “preserve the national polity and defend the imperial land, and thereby, accomplish the objective of the military expedition.” As a result, Japan’s war objectives, which until then were “self-sufficiency and self-defense” and “building the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere,” were limited to the “preservation of the national polity” and “defense of the imperial land.” This had two important meanings for Japan’s course towards the termination of the war.

First, it came to be understood within the Cabinet that Japan would attain its war objectives if the “national polity” and the “imperial land” were preserved, especially the former, and that the war would have been fought to its completion. Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki later stated, “This had considerable implications. I believed that the policy enabled the first steps to be made in our efforts towards the termination of the war.”⁴

This understanding was echoed by Hisatsune Sakomizu, Chief Secretary to the Cabinet, who was behind the drafting of the Basic Policy. He later wrote, “The Cabinet interpreted it to mean ‘if the national polity is preserved and the imperial land is defended, then the objective of the military expedition would be achieved.’ The Cabinet understood the Basic Policy as providing an orientation towards the end of the war.”⁵

While agreeing to limit Japan’s war objectives, the Army had a different notion from that of the Cabinet. For example, an Army officer and aide to Army Minister Korechika Anami wrote that attaining “One Blow, Certain Victory” in a battle for the Home Islands was the optimum means for actively achieving the major objective of the “preservation of the national polity,” which was at the heart of concluding the war. He went on to say that “the key to achieving peace lies in whether or not the national polity is preserved.”⁶ Whereas Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo and others intended to ensure the “preservation of the national polity” through diplomatic negotiations before the Home Islands were invaded, the Army felt that the “preservation of the national polity” could be ensured only by dealing one major blow and attaining certain victory in a battle for the Home Islands.

There is a classic work dealing with the termination of war authored by Paul Kecskemeti of the RAND Corporation in 1958 entitled *Strategic Surrender: The Politics of Victory and*

³ Ibid., p. 170.

⁴ *Shusen no Hyojo (Suzuki Kantaro Jutsu)* [Features of the Termination of the War As Told by Kantaro Suzuki] (Tokyo: Rodo Bunkasha, 1946), p. 26.

⁵ Hisatsune Sakomizu, *Shusen no Shinso* [The Truth of the End of the War] (Self-published, 1955), pp. 34-35.

⁶ Tadashi Nishiuchi and Masataka Iwata, *Otakebi: Daitoa Senso no Seishin to Kyujo Jiken* [The Spirit of the Great East Asia War and Kyujo Incident] (Tokyo: Nihon Kogyo Shinbunsha, 1982), pp. 223-225.

Defeat. This book undertakes theoretical analyses of the forms of war termination, comparing the experiences of Japan, Germany, and Italy. In the book, Kecskemeti notes, “The loser may decide to quit because he feels that his core values will not suffer, even if the winner has his way completely and permanently.”⁷ Because the Japanese leaders arrived at a shared understanding that Japan’s core value, i.e., the preservation of the “national polity,” was a war objective, the guidelines for realizing the termination of the war became clearer. The question was how to achieve this objective, i.e., through military force or negotiations.

Secondly, the principle of “building the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” that had been underscored at the Greater East Asia Conference in 1943 was eliminated from the list of Japan’s war objectives, and this served to further facilitate the termination of the war. In other words, as long as a principle such as the building of a co-prosperty sphere was a war objective, compromise between the two sides was difficult, and therefore, there was a likelihood for the war to be fought to the bitter end.⁸

A basic policy with such landmark significance was approved in the following circumstances. First, Germany surrendered on May 8. This absolved Japan from the issues of trust that had been used as an argument against Japan making a separate peace with the Allies. Second, as it became increasingly apparent that Japan was losing the battle in Okinawa, for which there had been high expectations, the momentum for pursuing immediate peace quickly grew, as opposed to making peace after striking the enemy a severe blow.

For example, according to the recently declassified “Showa Tenno Jitsuroku” [Annals of Emperor Showa], Foreign Minister Togo reported on April 30 on measures that Japan would take following Germany’s collapse, and in response, the Emperor expressed his “hopes for an early end to the war.”

The German war was of a different nature from Japan’s. It was a “war of annihilation” (Vernichtungung Krieg) in which the survival of the race and ideology was at stake. The war was founded on a powerful principle or ideology. Accordingly, it was a war of victory or destruction, and peace through compromise was out of the question.⁹

This kind of ideology surfaced in an extreme way in the last stage of the war. In March 1945, with defeat imminent, Adolf Hitler issued his famous Nero Decree and adopted a scorched earth policy involving the destruction of all assets in German territory. At this time, Hitler stated, “If the war is lost then the nation will be lost also...because this nation has shown itself the weaker. The future belongs exclusively to the stronger nation from the East.” In other words, Hitler felt that the weaker race did not deserve to exist any longer and should suffer the same fate as the defeated nation itself. Hitler’s desire for death and destruction was ultimately

⁷ Paul Kecskemeti, *Strategic Surrender: The Politics of Victory and Defeat* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 14.

⁸ Regarding the transformation of the war objective and its significance, see: Ryoichi Tobe, “Japan’s War Guidance: Three Key Points,” International Forum on War History Report *New Perspectives on the War in the Pacific: Grand Strategies, Military Governments and POWs*, National Institute for Defense Studies, March 2008.

⁹ For a recent work that discusses the characteristics of Nazism and war, see: Richard Bessel (Akira Oyama, trans.), *Nachisu no Senso 1918-1949: Minzoku to Jinshu no Tatakai* [Nazism and War] (Tokyo: Chuko-Shinsho, 2015).

directed at Germany itself, i.e., at the annihilation of Germany.¹⁰

Incidentally, in his second “Imperial Decision,” which he made during the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War on August 14, the Emperor stated: “Continuing the war will result in the whole nation being reduced to ashes. I cannot endure the thought of letting my people suffer any longer...Compared to the result of losing Japan completely, we can at least hope for reconstruction as long as some seeds remain.”¹¹ This decision is symbolic of the differences that existed between the Japanese and German political situation and political leaders at the time.

2. Japan-U.S. Relations

Second, I focus on the underlying factors behind Japan’s acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, namely, the so-called “moderates” in Japan and the United States, as well as the “relationship of trust” that existed between Japan and the United States even when they were adversaries.

In Japan, certain groups sought to realize peace between Japan and the United States from early in the war. For example, on the very day of the attack on Pearl Harbor, former Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoye said to his aide, “We will lose this war. I order you to study how Japan shall lose. It is the job of politicians to conduct this study.”¹² In January of the following year, 1942, Konoye stressed to Interior Minister Koichi Kido that the timing of the termination of the war should be considered as quickly as possible. Following this, on February 5, Kido advised the Emperor as follows: “The Great East Asia War will not be terminated easily. Ultimately, the quickest way to peace will be to fight the war to the end, including constructive efforts. Meanwhile, it will be necessary to grasp any opportunity to achieve peace as quickly as possible.” Additionally, on the 12th, the Emperor stated to Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, “While I realize that adequate considerations are being paid not to lose the opportunity of terminating the war, for the sake of humanity and peace we should not prolong the war and needlessly increase the heavy damage inflicted.”¹³

The tide of the war subsequently turned against Japan. Thus, from around summer 1943, key figures came together to promote efforts to bring the war to an end, under the leadership of a number of former prime ministers, including Konoye and Keisuke Okada. Other persons involved included Navy officers, such as Mitsumasa Yonai and Sokichi Takagi, Army officers from the “Imperial Way” faction; and Shigeru Yoshida, a diplomat. This movement first evolved as a campaign to overthrow the Tojo Cabinet and resulted in its entire resignation.

In addition, recent research indicates that there were even groups among mainstream

¹⁰ Sebastian Haffner (Tatsuo Akabane, trans.), *Hitora towa Nanika* [The Meaning of Hitler] (Tokyo: Soshisha Publishing, 1979), pp. 188-196.

¹¹ Kainan Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi* [The Secret History of the End of War] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 1985), p. 140.

¹² *Kataritsugu Showashi: Gekido no Hanseiki (3)* [Stories of the History of the Showa Period: A Tumultuous Half Century (3)] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Company, 1976), p. 304.

¹³ Kido Nikki Kenkyukai, ed., *Kido Koichi Kankei Bunsho* [Documentation Relating to Koichi Kido] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press: 1966), pp. 43-45.

Army officers, who had been considered a monolithic group, that aimed for the quick realization of peace. Many of these officers were assigned to the War Direction Section of the General Staff.¹⁴

In Germany, resistance movements occurred sporadically, including the July 20 assassination plot against Hitler. However, partially due to the exile of many anti-Nazi Germans, such as Willy Brandt, who later became Prime Minister, Germany lacked a wide range of groups or movements which were in the political mainstream and which explored ways of achieving peace to avoid a catastrophe, as was observed in Japan. Neither was there a movement within the German Army which attempted to forestall the ultimate defeat. At the same time, the United States continued to refuse all German requests for a partial or localized surrender, and repeatedly demanded a complete and immediate unconditional surrender.¹⁵

As for the Americans, so-called “pro-Japanese” persons played a significant role. An example is Joseph C. Grew of the State Department, who formerly served as Under Secretary of State. In the speeches he delivered across the United States, Grew explained that “moderates” or “liberals” existed in Japan, and that if the militarist clique were overthrown and the “moderates” or “liberals” placed in charge of leading the government, Japan could be rebuilt into a country that collaborates with the international community. Grew argued that the Emperor was on the side of moderates and liberals, and defended the Emperor system. Furthermore, Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, lauded Kijuro Shidehara, Reijiro Wakatsuki, and others as progressive politicians who had stood up to the militarist clique and had promoted the sound development of Japan.¹⁶

During the war, these persons had an enormous impact on policymaking, leading to the adoption of more moderate U.S. policies regarding Japan. An example is a memo titled “Conditions for Japanese Surrender” adopted by the Post-War Programs Committee of the State Department in November 1944. The memo essentially stated that the surrender terms would say that support would be provided to democratic and moderate persons who remain in Japan, and that the occupation forces would stand ready to assist with the democratization of Japan. The purport of this opinion varied significantly from the hardline stance prevailing in the United States that sought severe measures, including the eradication of the emperor system. These “pro-Japanese” persons judged that it would be more preferable to occupy Japan while collaborating with and making use of the “moderates” who continued to remain in Japan, and that occupying Japan would be more in line with American national interests.¹⁷

Further still, these persons were heavily involved in the drafting of the Potsdam

¹⁴ Tomoyuki Yamamoto, *Nihon Rikugun Senso Shuketsu Katei no Kenkyu* [Study of the Process of the Termination of the Japanese Army's War] (Tokyo: Fuyoshobo, 2010).

¹⁵ Yasushi Yamaguchi, “Hitora to Doitsu Kokubogun: Mujoken Kofuku eno Michi” [Hitler and the German Military: The Path to Unconditional Surrender], Masaki Miyake, ed., *Showashi no Gunbu to Seiji (4) Dainijitaisen to Gunbu Dokusai* [Military and Politics in Showa History (4): WW II and Military Dictatorship] (Tokyo: Dai-Ichi Hoki, 1983), pp. 216-224.

¹⁶ For the activities of the “pro-Japanese” persons, see, for example, Makoto Iokibe, *Nichibei Senso to Sengo Nihon* [Japan-U.S. War and Post-war Japan] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 2005); and Akira Iriye, *Nichibei Senso* [Japan-U.S. War] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Sha, 1978).

¹⁷ Iriye, *Nichibei Senso*, pp. 261-263.

Declaration, and, as a result, Paragraph 10 states, “The Japanese Government shall remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people. Freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights shall be established.” The clause “the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies” reflected the perception of the “pro-Japanese” persons.

Diplomatic historian Makoto Iokibe has referred to the extensive efforts made by these “pro-Japanese” persons as “good fortune in the midst of defeat” that was bestowed on Japan unexpectedly.¹⁸ Kecskemeti notes, “There were well-informed and intelligent people in policymaking positions whose knowledge of Japanese conditions enabled them to hit upon the right approach. Thus American surrender policy avoided what would have been the worst of the disasters towards which the cult of ‘unconditional surrender’ was pressing.”¹⁹

While no direct channels of negotiation existed between Japan and the United States, information on the activities of the “moderates” and others in the United States reached Japan. For example, in his famous statement to the Emperor in February 1945, Konoye states, “To date public opinion in Great Britain and United States has not gone so far as to favor a change of the national polity. (Of course, a part of public opinion is radical, and it is difficult to predict how opinion will change in the future.)” Asked what he thought about the Chief of the Army General Staff’s view that the United States would demand the elimination of the Imperial Family, Konoye responded that the Americans’ goal was to overthrow the militarist clique of Japan, and that “it seems the United States would not go that far, based on the views of Grew and the American leadership.” It was intelligence collected by the Public Affairs Bureau and other branches of the Foreign Ministry that formed the basis of such a view.²⁰

This sort of Japanese intelligence significantly influenced Japan’s acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration. In response to the Potsdam Declaration issued on July 26, which was followed by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet Union’s entry into the war, the Suzuki Cabinet issued an emergency telegram regarding the acceptance of the Declaration on August 10. It read that the Cabinet accepts the Declaration “with the understanding that the said declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a Sovereign Ruler.”

The United States then issued the following reply by Secretary of State James Byrnes: “The authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to rule the state shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied powers.” Japan received Byrnes’ reply on the 10th. Following this, opinion within the government became divided over how to interpret the reply and how Japan should respond, i.e., accept the terms, re-inquire, or continue with the war.

A recent study has revealed that at this critical time, the intelligence of neutral countries, including Sweden and Switzerland, especially played an important role in the communications

¹⁸ Iokibe, *Nichibei Senso to Sengo Nihon*, p. 189.

¹⁹ Kecskemeti, *Strategic Surrender*, p. 210.

²⁰ Junichiro Shoji, “‘Konoye Josobun’ no Saikento: Kokusai Josei Bunseki no Kanten kara” [Konoye Fumimaro and Konoye’s Memorial to the Throne in February 1945], *Kokusai Seiji* [International Relations], Vol. 109 (May 1995), pp. 62-64.

between senior Japanese and U.S. officials regarding the “preservation of the national polity.”²¹

For example, the study notes that the report “‘Potsudamu’ Sangoku Sengen ni kansuru Kansatsu” [Observations Concerning the Trilateral “Potsdam” Declaration] that was prepared based on European intelligence and submitted to Foreign Minister Togo recognized that the Declaration affirmed Japanese sovereignty, used the phrase “unconditional surrender” in relation to the Japanese military, and did not refer to the Imperial Family and the national polity. On this basis, the report contended that the Declaration had taken the maintaining of Japan’s honor into consideration and adopted a stance that was considerably different from that taken towards Germany.

Furthermore, the study refers to the telegram from the Minister to Sweden, Suemasa Okamoto, that arrived in Japan on August 13. The telegram described local news reports claiming that the United States had won an “American diplomatic victory” by successfully overriding opposition from the Soviet Union and other countries and forcing them to accept the continuation of the Emperor system. Based on his analysis of these news reports, Okamoto concluded that the essence of Japan’s terms had been accepted. The study notes that this was communicated also to the Emperor and Prime Minister Suzuki and affected subsequent developments.²²

Shunichi Matsumoto, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, had the following notion: “As we had imagined, the United States took our request, and, despite considerable opposition, considered and indirectly approved it by wording it differently.” The Vice Minister handed the telegram to Suzuki and requested its immediate acceptance.²³ At a time when opinion was divided over the response to Byrnes’ reply and Suzuki himself was wavering, the effect of such information was not negligible.

In any event, as a result of these developments, the Emperor commented in his second decision to the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War that, “While it is natural that we have some concerns about our counterpart’s attitude, I do not want to doubt it.”²⁴

Before and after making this comment, the Emperor twice dissuaded the strong concerns expressed by Army Minister Anami towards the American reply, saying: “Do not worry, Anami, I have conclusive proof” (August 12),²⁵ and “Anami, I fully understand your feelings, but I am confident that I can preserve the national polity” (August 14).²⁶ These remarks suggest that the Emperor had obtained a certain amount of evidence through intelligence and other sources.

Moreover, it cannot be ignored that the Emperor and Suzuki had a certain degree of trust

²¹ Tetsuo Arima, “*Suisu Chohomo*” no Nichibei Shusen Kosaku: Potsudamu Sengen wa Naze Ukeiraretanoka [Japan-U.S. End of War Efforts Relating to the “Swiss Espionage Network”: Why Was the Potsdam Declaration Accepted], (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2015).

²² Ibid., pp. 251-254 and 273-276.

²³ Sumio Hatano, *Saisho Suzuki Kantaro no Ketsudan: “Seidan” to Sengo Nihon* [Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki’s Decision: The Emperor’s Decision and Post-war Japan] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2015), p. 212.

²⁴ Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi*, p. 140.

²⁵ The Military History Society of Japan, ed., *Daihonei Rikugunbu Senso Shidohan Kimitsu Senso Nisshi Ge* [War Direction Section, Army Division, Imperial Headquarters, Confidential War Diary, Vol. II] (Tokyo: Kinseisha, 1998), p. 757.

²⁶ Hisanori Fujita, *Jijuchō no Kaiso* [The Grand Chamberlain’s Memoir] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1961), p. 141.

in the United States, and therefore, positively interpreted the information they had acquired. At the Cabinet meeting on the 13th, Suzuki stated as follows in regard to Byrnes' reply: "From re-reading it over and over, I sense that the United States did not write it with evil intent. We have different national situations. We also have different views. I believe that it will not essentially change the Emperor system. We should not object to the wording."²⁷ Suzuki's stance "in effect signified his trust in the 'good intentions' of the American leaders in regard to the preservation of the national polity."²⁸

In his second decision to the Supreme Council, the Emperor stated, "I understand that there are various doubts regarding the issue of national polity. However, based on the meaning of the text of this reply, I take it that our counterpart has good intentions."²⁹ A historian has noted that indeed, "The judgments of Suzuki and the Emperor were strongly supported by a simple trust in the United States and Americans."³⁰

A well-known example of Japan's trust in the United States is Japan's reaction to the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Suzuki expressed his condolences, saying, "I must admit that Roosevelt's leadership has been very effective and has been responsible for the Americans' advantageous position today." The Prime Minister went on to say, "For that reason I can easily understand the great loss his passing means to the American people and my profound sympathy goes to them."³¹ In contrast, Suzuki did not send a congratulatory telegram five days later on the 56th birthday of Hitler, the leader of Germany, Japan's ally.

On the other hand, on hearing the news of Roosevelt's death, the Nazi leadership was delighted that this would bring a turning point in the war. Hitler is said to have issued a statement which stated, "Fate has taken from us Roosevelt, the greatest war criminal in history." Thomas Mann, a German writer who was in exile in the United States at the time, wrote, "Japan is now at war with the United States with life and death at stake... In that oriental country, there still exists a spirit of chivalry and a sensitivity to human dignity. It still reveres a person who has died and reveres a person of great character. These are the differences between Germany and Japan."³²

This episode illuminates the differences between the Japan-U.S. and U.S.-German relationships at the time. A relationship of trust like that between Japan and the United States did not exist at all between the United States and the Nazi regime.

As was described, even during the war, a certain "relationship of trust" existed between Japan and the United States. On this point, diplomatic historian Akira Iriye wrote as follows in the conclusion of *Nichibei Senso* (The Japan-U.S. War, translated as *Power and Culture*), his book that discusses the Pacific War. "Since the 19th century, Japan and the United States had similar fundamental postures and roles. For that very reason, notwithstanding the fact

²⁷ Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi*, p. 128.

²⁸ Hatano, *Saisho Suzuki Kantaro no Ketsudan*, p. 202.

²⁹ Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi*, p. 140.

³⁰ Hatano, *Saisho Suzuki Kantaro no Ketsudan*, p. 224.

³¹ Sukehiro Hirakawa, *Heiwa no Umi to Tatakai no Umi* [Sea of Peace and Sea of War] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 1993), p. 81.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

that the two countries were in an extreme adversarial wartime relationship, the transition to the postwar Japan-U.S. relationship was made relatively smooth by returning to the previous form.”³³

3. Military Factor: The Gap Between Japanese and U.S. Perception on the Decisive Battle for the Home Islands

Third, I consider the contrasting perceptions of the military significance between Japan and the United States on the “Decisive Battle for the Japanese Home Islands,” which was codenamed Operation “Ketsu” by the Japanese and “Operation Downfall” by the Americans. From around spring 1945, around the time Germany was defeated, the Emperor began to have much interest in a battle for the Home Islands.³⁴ For example, the “Showa Tenno Jitsuroku” records that on May 9, after listening to a report from Chief of the Army General Staff Yoshijiro Umezu for more than one hour, the Emperor “communicated the Imperial General Headquarters Army Order (to the relevant commanders) to the effect that they shall facilitate the execution of the Battle for the Home Islands.”

Despite inquiring about the actual state of preparations for defending the Home Islands, the Emperor failed to receive a clear-cut explanation from the Army. He thus actively attempted to grasp the situation by a number of means, including the sending of the Emperor’s aides-de-camp to inspect Togane and Katakai, the beaches in the vicinity of Kujukurihama, on June 3 and 4.³⁵

On June 9, Umezu returned from an inspection of Manchuria and reported to the Emperor. The content was pessimistic: Japan’s troop strength in Manchuria was only equivalent to eight U.S. divisions, and Japan only had enough ammunition for a single battle. On hearing this report, the Emperor began to believe that “as the forces in the homeland are far more insufficiently equipped than the forces in Manchuria and China, there is no way they could fight.” The report therefore became one of the factors that heightened the Emperor’s anxieties regarding the end of the war.³⁶

Navy Admiral Kiyoshi Hasegawa, who had been sent to strategic areas in Japan as a special inspector general of assets of fighting power, briefed the Emperor on June 12. Hasegawa reported that due to the lack of weapons, shortage of equipment, and inadequate training of personnel, the forces at the projected fronts could not possibly fight a battle for the Home Islands. As an example, Hasegawa explained that small boats, which were hastily built,

³³ Iriye, *Nichibei Senso*, pp. 330-331.

³⁴ For a study that analyzes the relationship between the emperor and the end of war from the context of the decisive battle for the Home Islands, see: Tamon Suzuki, “Showa Tenno to Nihon no ‘Shusen’” [Emperor Showa and Japan’s “End of War”], Shinichi Kitaoka, ed., *Kokusai Kankyo no Henyo to Seigun Kankei* [Transformation of the International Situation and Civil-Military Relations] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2013).

³⁵ War History Office, National Defense College, Defense Agency, *Senshi Soshō Daihonei Rikugunbu <10>* [Military History Series: Army Department, Imperial Headquarters <10>], Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1975, p. 449.

³⁶ Takashi Ito, ed., *Sokichi Takagi Nikki to Joho Ge* [Sokichi Takagi: Diary and Information Vol. II] (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 2000), pp. 885-886.

installed with used car engines, and operated by inadequately trained personnel, were to be utilized as suicide attack weapons. The Emperor was astonished and commented, “I can fully imagine.”³⁷

At around the same time, Prince Morihiro Higashikuni informed the Emperor that not only the coastal defense forces but also the combat divisions were insufficiently supplied with weapons, and that shovels were being made with the iron that had been salvaged from bombs dropped by the enemy. Based on this information, the Emperor “confirmed that war was impossible.”³⁸

Then on June 13, the Emperor was notified of the “honorable death” of the Navy’s garrison in Okinawa, and on June 14 and the following day, fell ill and did not make any public appearances.

According to the “Showa Tenno Jitsuroku,” on June 20, the Emperor “stated that he desired an early termination of the war” to Foreign Minister Togo. On this occasion, the Emperor allegedly stated, “Based on the recent reports of the Chief of the Army General Staff, Chief of the Naval General Staff, and Admiral Hasegawa, it has become clear that our operational readiness in China and on the Japanese homeland are inadequate for a war...Please proceed to terminate the war as quickly as possible.”³⁹

On June 22, at the meeting of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War that was convoked by the Emperor, the Emperor once again requested the swift realization of peace, stating, “A decision regarding the directing of the war was examined by the Imperial Conference that was held earlier. I desire that concrete plans to end the war, unhampered by existing policy, be speedily studied and that efforts be made to implement them.”⁴⁰

In effect, the series of reports regarding a battle for the Home Islands had a significant influence on the Emperor’s perception. Many historians note that these reports led the Emperor to abandon the idea of making peace after dealing the enemy a severe blow, and shift instead to the pursuit of the swift realization of peace.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the Army continued to call for the “Honorable Death by 100 Million,” and with continued confidence, insisted that a “Battle of the Japanese Home Islands” be carried out. At the meeting of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War held on August 9, shortly after the atomic bombings and the Soviet Union’s entry into the war, Togo asked, “Are you confident that you can prevent the enemy from landing on Japanese homeland?”

³⁷ Statement by Kiyoshi Hasegawa; and Motoei Sato and Fumitaka Kurosawa, eds., *GHQ Rekishika Chinjutsuroku: Shusenshi Shiryo (Ge)* [GHQ History Division’s Deposition Records: End of War Archive (Vol. II)] (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 2002), pp. 569-570.

³⁸ Hidenari Terasaki and Mariko Terasaki Miller, eds., *Showa Tenno Dokuhakuroku Terasaki Hidenari Goyogakari Nikki* [Diary of Hidenari Terasaki, General Official of the Imperial Household: Emperor Showa’s Monologue], *Bungei Shunju*, 1991, p. 118.

³⁹ Shigenori Togo (Togo Shigenori Kinenkai, ed.) *Jidai no Ichimen* [An Aspect of Time] (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1985), p. 340.

⁴⁰ Koichi Kido (Kido Koichi Nikki Kenkyukai Kotei), *Kido Koichi Nikki Gekan* [Diary of Koichi Kido Vol. II] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1966), pp. 1212-1213.

⁴¹ For example, Kazutoshi Hando, *Showashi 1926-1945* [Showa History 1926-1945] (Tokyo: Heibonsha Library, 2009), p. 461; Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Anto Sutarin, Toruman to Nihon Kofuku* [Secret Feud: Stalin, Truman, and Japan’s Surrender] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2006), p. 167.

Umezu responded, “If it goes extremely well, we can even repel the enemy. Because it is a war, however, it is hard to conceive that it will definitely go well. While we will concede some landings, I am confident that we can inflict severe casualties on the enemy during their invasion.”⁴² The Army, while recognizing that ultimate victory was impossible, continued to hang on to a thread of hope.

Nevertheless, in his first decision to the Supreme Council on the same day, the Emperor stated, “You keep talking about decisive fighting for the Home Islands, but the defenses at the most important area, Kujukurihama, have yet to be completed. In addition, the divisions that will be involved in this battle are inadequately equipped, and it is said that their equipment will not be complete until after mid-September... Your plans are never executed. Given that, how can we win the war?”⁴³ The Emperor thus referred to the incomplete preparations for the battle for the Home Islands, and not to the atomic bombings and the Soviet Union’s entry into the war as reasons for accepting the Potsdam Declaration. The Emperor added, “What would happen if we were to plunge into the Battle for the Home Islands in this condition? I am very worried. I think to myself, will this mean that all the Japanese people will have to die? If so, how can we leave this nation Japan to posterity?”⁴⁴ Incidentally, the “Showa Tenno Jitsuroku,” records as follows. “I often hear that the Army is confident of securing victory. But plans are not matched by their execution, and with the insufficient state of defenses and weapons, there is no prospect that we will win against the U.S. and British forces that boast mechanical strength.”

In response to this comment by the Emperor, Army Major General Tatsuhiko Takashima, then Chief of Staff of the 12th Area Army and the Eastern Command Headquarters who was entrusted with the defense of the Kanto area, felt responsible for the reference to the “biggest shortcoming” of the 12th Area Army, and responded, “the Battle for the Home Islands is just a ‘house of cards’ as is symbolized by the defensive positions at Kujukurihama.”⁴⁵ Conversely, the Army General Staff frequently inspected the defenses in various areas in preparation for the Battle for the Home Islands. Its reports described that not only were the fortifications, supplies, training, and logistics supplies all inadequate, but even the spirit of decisive fighting was lacking. As such, in reality the General Staff also recognized the difficult situation.⁴⁶

It is noteworthy that in this decision to the Supreme Council, as noted above, the Emperor expressed his distrust of the military, stating that the actions of the Army and Navy commands were not in line with their plans, giving as an example the preparations for defending the Home Islands. Additionally, the Emperor noted that the conduct of the Army and the Navy since the

⁴² Togo, *Jidai no Ichimen*, p. 357.

⁴³ Kido, *Kido Koichi Nikki Gekan*, pp. 1223-1224.

⁴⁴ Hisatsune Sakomizu, *Dainihon Teikoku Saigo no Yonkagetsu: Shusen Naikaku “Futokorogatana” no Shogen* [The Last Four Months of the Japanese Empire: Testimony of the End of War Cabinet’s “Confidant”] (Tokyo: Kawade Bunko, 2015), pp. 207-208.

⁴⁵ Yomiuri Shimbun, ed., *Showashi no Tenno 3: Hondo Kessen to Potsudamu Sengen* [The Emperor in Showa History 3: Battle of the Japanese Home Islands and the Potsdam Declaration] (Tokyo: Chuo Bunko, 2012), pp. 44-45.

⁴⁶ See, for example, War History Office, National Defense College, *Senshi Sosho Daihonei Rikugunbu <10>*, pp. 247-253, 310-316, 376-377.

outbreak of the war showed significant discrepancies between their “plans and results.” With regard to the defense of Kujukuri, the Emperor said, “In fact, what my aides-de-camp later told me after seeing the site is very different from what the Chief of the Army General Staff told me. I understand that most of the defenses are incomplete.”⁴⁷

These remarks sent shock waves among the Army leadership. Torashiro Kawabe, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army, wrote in his diary, “The imperial decision was issued. In short, His Majesty has no expectations for Japan’s future operations.” Kawabe went on to say, “I am afraid His Majesty did not arrive at this view as a result of the debates during the Imperial Conference. That is to say, His Majesty has no expectations for Japan’s future operations. In other words, His Majesty has no trust in the military...It was an expression of his increasing distrust in the military. This distrust was directly expressed by His Imperial Highness the Emperor.”⁴⁸ Shuichi Miyazaki, Chief of the First Bureau, General Staff Office, wrote in his diary, “A day of great misfortune. What humiliation.”⁴⁹

In effect, the distrust in the Army that the Emperor made explicit for the first time over the preparations for defending the Home Islands was one of the reasons the Emperor accepted the Potsdam Declaration. This had a greater effect than military reasons in encouraging the Army, especially its General Staff, to give up on the war. While admitting Japan’s military defeat, the Army had asked for an opportunity to somehow strike the enemy. However, the Emperor’s distrust in the Army severed all such glimmers of hope.

Incidentally, according to the “Showa Tenno Jitsuroku,” shortly before issuing his second decision to the Supreme Council on August 14, the Emperor summoned Army Marshals Hajime Sugiyama and Shunroku Hata as well as Navy Marshal-Admiral Osami Nagano and asked for their views. Hata opined that regrettably there was no guarantee that Japan could repel the enemy, and that the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration was inevitable. Both Sugiyama and Nagano responded, “The military still has strength remaining, and its morale is strong. Based on these, it should be able to resist and resolutely repel the invading U.S. Forces.”

This shows that the idea of resisting to the very end was deeply ingrained in the military. Consequently, the looming reality of the Battle for the Home Islands and the diverging views that surfaced between the Emperor and the Army decisively influenced the process of war termination, similar to the shock of the atomic bombings and the Soviet Union’s entry into the war.

On August 12, the Emperor called the entire Imperial Family to the Imperial Palace, and explained the reasons for his first decision to the Supreme Council. He said the reasons were the depletion of national strength from the prolonged war, successive defeats, aerial bombings, and “circumstances that do not lead me to believe that the military would be victorious in the Battle for the Home Islands.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Sakomizu, *Dainihon Teikoku Saigo no Yonkagetsu*, pp. 207-208.

⁴⁸ Kawabe Torashiro Bunsho Kenkyukai, ed., *Shosho Hikkin: Rikugun wa Akumade Goseidan ni Shitagaite Kodosu* [Follow the Words of the Emperor: The Army will Act in Compliance with the Imperial Decision] (Tokyo: Kokushokankokai, 2005), pp. 178-179.

⁴⁹ War History Office, National Defense College, *Senshi Soshō Daihonei Rikugunbu <10>*, p. 453.

⁵⁰ Naruhiko Higashikuni, *Higashikuni Nikki: Nihon Gekidoki no Hiroku* [Diary of Higashikuni: Memoir of Japan’s Tumultuous Period] (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten Publishing, 1968), p. 200.

For the United States, on the other hand, despite Japan's incomplete and poor preparations for a battle for the Home Islands, potential human losses presented a major issue as the launch of Operation Downfall approached. In other words, Japan's residual force and anticipated suicidal attacks were threats to the United States. Furthermore, the severity and cost of the battles for Iwo Jima and Okinawa that the United States incurred due to Japanese military resistance—the death or injury of an estimated 35% of the American forces committed—provided a significant disincentive to proceeding with the invasion.

On June 18, 1945, President Harry S. Truman convened a meeting at the White House to consider Operation Downfall and its expected casualties. At the meeting, opinion was divided, especially regarding the estimated number of deaths and injuries resulting from the operation. William D. Leahy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and others noted that nearly 35% died or were injured in the Battle for Okinawa, and forecasted that Operation Downfall would result in a similar death toll. Accordingly, they were reluctant about the operation, and called for easing the terms of unconditional surrender in order to minimize the casualties. Meanwhile, George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, had a more optimistic outlook. In the end, the meeting approved Operation Olympic (invasion of Kyushu) and decided to put Operation Coronet (invasion of the Kanto Plain) on hold for the time being.⁵¹

On July 2, Secretary of War Stimson submitted a memorandum to President Truman to explain the purpose of the draft Potsdam Declaration. He referred to the fierce fighting on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and at the same time, noted, "If we once land on one of the main islands and begin a forceful occupation of Japan, we shall probably have cast the die of last ditch resistance." For this reason, Stimson advised that the United States should strive for the prompt and economical achievement of its objectives, by presenting conditions to Japan.⁵²

Of course, at the time, the various departments within the U.S. Government each had their own projections of the number of deaths and injuries from Operation Downfall, which were calculated based on their respective positions. A number of recent studies based on newly released historical records tend to estimate higher numbers of casualties.⁵³

For example, Edward J. Drea states that based on "ULTRA," the cryptographic intelligence on the Japanese military, American forces were aware of the Japanese military's reinforcements in southern Kyushu. Drea notes that this led to a sharp rise in the United States' estimate of the number of its deaths and injuries, raising concerns about the operation among its authorities.

Richard B. Frank asserts that on a monthly basis, the U.S. Forces would have incurred record high numbers of war casualties from the invasion of Kyushu.

In any case, concern about the military cost which would be incurred if the United States invaded the Japanese Home Islands led them to reconsider their demand for Japan's unconditional surrender, and ultimately, the war ended with Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration.

⁵¹ Makoto Iokibe, *Beikoku no Nihon Senryo Seisaku: Sengo Nihon no Sekkeizu Ge* [U.S. Occupation Policy towards Japan: The Blueprint of Post-war Japan Vol. II] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Sha, 1985), pp. 180-187; and Hasegawa, *Anto*, pp. 168-172.

⁵² Iokibe, *Beikoku no Nihon Senryo Seisaku*, p. 192.

⁵³ Kort, "Hiroshima to Rekishika," pp. 483-487.

Kecskemeti writes, “Our theoretical analysis implies that strong residual capabilities on the losing side are apt to produce a substantial ‘disarming’ effect on the winning side by inclining the winner to make political concessions to the loser as incentives for surrender.” In this regard, Kecskemeti notes that unlike Germany and Italy in the final stage of the war, potential battles in Japan that would reflect Japan’s geographical advantages as an island country, the residual capabilities of the Japanese military, and Japan’s extreme will to resist were regarded as grave threats by the United States. Kecskemeti notes that they thus served as valuable assets in the transactions and negotiations conducted in order to obtain political concessions in exchange for surrender.⁵⁴

Military historian John Ferris notes that Japanese assets and combat that caused the U.S. Forces to incur heavy casualties in the Pacific theater “did achieve some political objectives. Its defeat achieved a victory of a kind.”⁵⁵

Aside from these military considerations of cost-effectiveness, other factors served as incentives for the reconsideration of Operation Downfall. They included war weariness in the United States stemming from the defeat of Germany, which had been the primary enemy, and the resulting termination of the war in Europe, and remorse over the destruction brought about by the final stage of the war against Germany, where the German homeland became the battlefield.

Conclusion

Had decisive fighting taken place on the Home Islands, Japan and the United States would have incurred even more losses of human life. Moreover, Japan’s urban areas and countryside would have been devastated, and Japan would likely have been put under direct foreign rule and would conceivably have been partitioned similar to Germany. Japan, however, was able to avoid this tragedy by terminating the war quicker than Germany did, i.e., before decisive fighting on the Home Islands began. This is perhaps the reason why Japan calls the termination of the war the “end of war” or “defeat in war,” while postwar Germany refers to the end of its war as “liberation” (from Nazism) or “defeat (collapse).”

Incidentally, the notion that it was “liberation” was introduced by President Richard von Weizsäcker in his famous address to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the end of the war. The President identified May 8 as the day of “liberation” from Nazism, and this view has now become widespread.⁵⁶

For Japan, on the other hand, the termination of the war literally signified the “end of war.” Under circumstances of a military “defeat,” the termination of the war was achieved,

⁵⁴ Kecskemeti, *Strategic Surrender*, pp. 158, 210, 220.

⁵⁵ John Ferris, “Politics as Strategy: The United States and the End of the Pacific War, 1944-45,” Masaki Miyake et al., eds., *Nihon to Rengokoku no Senryaku Hikaku: Kensho Taiheiyo Senso to Sono Senryaku 3* [Comparison of Japanese and Allied Strategies: A Study of the Pacific War and Its Strategy 3] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2013), p. 253.

⁵⁶ For information on the dispute in Germany, see Richard von Weizsäcker and Tsutomu Yamamoto, *Kako no Kokufuku / Futatsu no Sengo* [Past Conquests and Two Post-wars] (Tokyo: NHK Publishing, Inc., 1994), pp. 180-211.

accompanied by difficulties and sacrifice despite agreeing to the disadvantageous term of unconditional surrender. It was stated in the Potsdam Declaration that the representatives of the United States, China, and Great Britain “have conferred and agree that Japan shall be given an opportunity to end this war.”

Of course, in contrast to the war against Germany in the European theater, where there was a complex interaction among the military objectives and interests of multiple countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, Japan was in a more favorable situation. As noted by diplomatic historian Sumio Hatano, “The war to be concluded was not a war staged in China or Asia; it was the Japan-U.S. war that came down to a contest of military strength.”⁵⁷ As this paper has examined, whether it is the limiting of war objectives, the existence of a relationship of trust, or the considerations of a battle for the Home Islands, virtually all of them were matters that concerned Japan and the United States. This prevented the further complication of the political situation, and made the termination of the war relatively easy. Furthermore, “pro-Japanese” persons existed in the United States (and “moderates” that could support them in Japan). In addition, even others, including U.S. policymakers and military personnel, had to factor in the human cost of war, having seen the fierce resistance of the Japanese military in the last stages of the war. In turn, the United States called for revisions to the policy of unconditional surrender from both the standpoints of “trust” and reasonableness.

⁵⁷ Sumio Hatano, “Shusen wo Meguru Shidoshazo: Suzuki Kantaro wo Chushin ni” [Images of Leaders in the End of War: With a Focus on Kantaro Suzuki], Ryoichi Tobe, ed., *Kindai Nihon no Ridashippu: Kiro ni Tatsu Shidosha tachi* [Leadership in Modern Japan: Leaders at the Crossroads] (Tokyo: Chikura Shobo, 2014), p. 194.

