

**Section II.**  
**The Second World War**  
**and Strategy**



## CHAPTER 6

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# Undecided Decision: Japan's "Northbound" and Richard Sorge Spy Ring in 1941

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### Introduction

Japan's external policies were divided into the Northbound and the Southbound before the Second World War. The "Northbound" was an idea that Japan should expand its territory, influence and military power toward Manchuria and Siberia in terms of politics, economy and national security. Before the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, Japan's military strategy was defensive. After the war, Japan succeeded the South Manchuria Railway and the tip of Liaodong Peninsula including Port Arthur from Russia, which was the most appropriate landing place for the Japanese armed forces. This would enable rapid concentration in the center of Manchuria.

The Northbound was associated with the sectional interests of the Japanese army, while the Southbound was linked to those of the navy, inasmuch as they each had a potential adversary: Russia and the United States. In this paper, I will elaborate on the concept of "Northbound" of the Japanese army and discuss how this policy was abandoned in 1941. And then, I will examine whether the international intelligence group that was set up by the USSR affected Japanese decisions politically and militarily.

### 1. Strategies of the Japanese Army in the 1930s

E.H. Carr argued that the most significant event in 1929 for the Soviet Union occurred in Manchuria, when Zhang Xueliang sought to resume the Chinese Eastern Railway.<sup>1</sup> His efforts were met with resistance from the USSR, which launched the Sino-Soviet Conflict. In this battle near Manzhouli, the Soviet army beat the Chinese army with overwhelming mechanized artillery, aircraft

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<sup>1</sup> Edward H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin, 1917-1929*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 181.

(including bombardment aircraft) and tanks.

The conflict was critical for Japan as well. The Japanese army was shocked by the strength of the Far Eastern Soviet army. In particular, they estimated the flight range of the bombardment aircraft of the Soviets at that time to be 1,000 to 1,500 km; when extended to 2,000 to 3,000 km in the near future, the USSR could bombard mainland Japan from the airbase in the maritime province of Siberia. After the Russo-Japanese War, Japan's grand strategy was to fight outside the main islands, Manchuria and the West Pacific Ocean area. "The standards of force strength" of the army and navy should have allowed them to take the offense against Russia and the United States in those areas. However, the resurrection of the Soviet forces was an evident sign of the failure of this grand strategy.

This sense of threat became the most important motivation for Japanese soldiers, especially middle-ranking officers who planned and executed the Mukden Incident in 1931. Some of them were then deployed to the staff of the Kwantung Army at Lüshun.<sup>2</sup>

In 1928, they assassinated Zhang Zuolin, the father of Zhang Xueliang, in Mukden. The reluctance of Zuolin to agree on railroad construction with the Japanese side became a trigger for the assassination. The Japanese government officially decided on a railroad construction plan in north Manchuria in 1927. By constructing the branch lines of the South Manchuria Railway (SMR), which were bound for the north, northeast and northwest toward the border areas, they intended to prepare for battle with the USSR and to develop the heavy and chemical industry using the mineral resources along the lines.

A representative figure of the officer group, Teichi Suzuki, recalled after World War II that the aims of the Mukden Incident in 1931 were: 1) the enhancement of transportation and communication facilities for preparing for a war against the USSR; 2) the settlement of the surplus population in mainland Japan; and 3)

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<sup>2</sup> The Kwantung Army was established in 1919. It originated from the troops deployed to protect the interests on the Liaodong Peninsula. After the South Manchuria Railway Company succeeded from Russia following the Russo-Japanese War, the potential enemy for the Japanese army was always Russia. It was because the political and military leaders had thought the Russian Empire would start a revenge war. In reality, the relationship between the two countries improved. Confidential clauses contained in the 1907 and 1912 agreements between Japan and Russia indicate their respective areas of influence in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia: South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia for Japan, and North Manchuria and Western Inner Mongolia for Russia.

exploiting mineral resources for military industries for the future total war.<sup>3</sup>

After Kanji Ishiwara joined the Kwantung Army as Chief of Operations in October 1928, he and other staff conducted several field trips in north Manchuria. He advised his colleagues to set a "culminating point of the offensive" for the future battlefield of Manchuria in the Khingan Mountains (the Greater Khingan and Lesser Khingan) and the Plains of Hulunbuir (northwest of Qiqihar).<sup>4</sup>

In March 1932, just five months after the Incident, the Manchukuo government was established.<sup>5</sup> The Army's General Staff had updated its anti-Soviet strategy by August 1932. They expected the main force of the Soviet Army to intrude along the western frontier (Greater Khingan), with branch operations taking place on the northern and eastern frontiers. Then, immediately after the outbreak of the war, the Kwantung Army was to take the offensive in the east, destroying each unit there, and then intercepting the main force in the northern frontier. By applying the lessons of the Schlieffen Plan from World War I and developing railways and an information infrastructure in Manchuria, they intended to predominate with mobility on each front.

However, the military expansion of the USSR in the Far East was much faster and more massive than the Japanese army had expected. In September 1933, the Chief of Operations of the General Staff, Col. Yorimichi Suzuki, admitted to his friend at the War Ministry that they were not confident of victory against the USSR owing to the gap in aircraft power between the two countries.<sup>6</sup> The senior officials in the army of this period were seen as hardliners against Russia. However, their aim was to limit the adversary to the Soviets alone, inasmuch as

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<sup>3</sup> 木戸日記研究会編『鈴木貞一氏談話速記録』上巻、1971年、61、68頁 [Kido Nikki Kenkyukai ed., *The Oral History of Teiichi Suzuki*, vol. 1, Tokyo, 1971, p. 61, 68].

<sup>4</sup> The reasoning was that, if the battle were fought in Central Manchuria, the Japanese army would face an uphill battle due to the advanced artillery and mechanized corps of the Soviet Army. It was thought that North Manchuria should be occupied instead, and that the Japanese army should fight in the mountain range along the border with Russia. The defense relied on taking advantage of the slopes in the wave-like plains of Hulunbuir.

<sup>5</sup> By agreement between Puyi (the last Emperor of Qing dynasty) and the Commander of the Kwantung Army, Japan had the responsibility to protect Manchukuo, and the Japanese army was entitled to use every resource for the defense of the new state, including developing new railways and airfields. Under this fictional relationship between the two states, the Japanese army achieved the rights to implement the military plan against the Soviets.

<sup>6</sup> 「鈴木貞一日記」1933年9月27日条『史学雑誌』87巻1号、史学会、1978年1月 [September 27, 1933 in "Diaries of Teiichi Suzuki," in *Shigaku Zasshi*, vol. 87, no. 1, Tokyo, Jan. 1978].

they declined the Soviets' proposal for a non-aggression treaty and the concession of the Eastern Chinese Railway.

Thus, as a consequence of the Mukden Incident and the establishment of Manchukuo, both Japan and the USSR were forced to expand their military power in the Far East. As a result of this arms race, the military balance between the two countries was completely broken by 1935.<sup>7</sup> The gap in the strength of aircraft and tanks was estimated at three times in 1933, and more than five times in 1935.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Intelligence Warfare in the Far East

Soviet efforts in the domain of military intelligence against Japan had also been reinforced since 1929. Richard Sorge, one of the most famous spies in history, seemed to be the conductor of the unit.

Sorge was born in the Russian Empire in Baku, which is the capital of the Republic of Azerbaijan. His father was a skilled oil driller from Germany and his mother was a native Russian. He relocated to his father's homeland and joined the First World War, where he was seriously injured three times. After the war, he returned to being a student. While studying for a doctorate at the University of Hamburg, he joined the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). After finishing his studies at Hamburg, he moved to Frankfurt and worked as a research associate at the Institute of Social Research, which was established for the development of innovative Marxist social sciences in 1924. In the same year, Sorge attended guests from the Comintern headquarters at the secret conference of KPD.<sup>9</sup>

He was then recruited by some cadre of the Comintern and selected as an agent of the Comintern headquarters. After serving in Scandinavian countries, he was reallocated to the Red Army's Fourth Department (the Main Intelligence Directorate, later the GRU) in 1929 and soon thereafter sent to Shanghai, China in the autumn of 1930. There, he gained his most valuable companion, Hotsumi

<sup>7</sup> In late 1935, it seemed that the strength of both sides was as follows: Japan had 5 divisions, 200 aircraft, and 150 tanks; the Soviets, 14 rifle divisions, 950 aircraft, and 850 tanks.

<sup>8</sup> 防衛庁防衛研修所戦史室『戦史叢書 関東軍(1)』朝雲新聞社、1969年、194-195頁 [National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), *Senshi Soshō: Kwantung Army*, vol. 1, Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1969, pp. 194-195].

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Deakin, Richard Storry, *The Case of Richard Sorge*, New York: Harper & Row, 1966, pp. 36-39.

Ozaki. Ozaki was born in Tokyo in 1901. After graduating from Tokyo Imperial University, he joined the Asahi Shimbun (a newspaper publisher). In 1928, he became a correspondent in Shanghai; in little time, he gained a strong reputation as a journalist specializing in China issues. Chalmers Johnson argued in his book on Ozaki and Sorge that they were the most intellectually overqualified spies in modern history. "Neither was a spy for financial gain; their motivations were political, and of the two, Ozaki's were the more sophisticated and the more daring."<sup>10</sup>

How did they meet in that chaotic city? It had been believed that Agnes Smedley, a well-known leftwing American journalist from Missouri, mediated between them, because Sorge repeatedly emphasized this in statements before prosecutors. However, recently, it has come to light that the encounter between the two intellects had been deliberately planned in a Communist's network. Ginichi Kito, a Japanese member of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), was the node that connected them.<sup>11</sup>

For the Soviet intelligence community, the CPUSA was a perfect footing for their worldwide activities, as it included many immigrant members from various countries. The CPUSA was divided into 13 factions by language, and the Japanese faction had about 40 members. The Comintern directed each communist party to establish and strengthen secret illegal leadership organizations. The party in the USA had two faces. One was the "vanguard" of the labor class, leading labor movements in the great depression and engaging the anti-fascist people's front in the Spanish civil war. The other, darker side was the base for the worldwide operations of the Comintern, specifically those guided by the secret organ named the OMS (the International Liaison Department). The OMS was in charge of illegal activities, such as forgery of passports, alien smuggling, and underground cash transfers, not only for the Comintern, but also for GRU, NKVD (the People's

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<sup>10</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *An Instance of Treason: Ozaki Hotsumi and the Sorge Spy Ring*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> 加藤哲郎「ゾルゲ事件:覆された神話」平凡社、2014年、186-187頁 [Tetsuro Kato, *The Sorge Case: the End of a Myth*, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2014, pp. 186-187].

Commissariat for Internal Affairs) etc.<sup>12</sup>

Kito seemed to have been ordered to acquire Ozaki for Sorge. Sanzo Nosaka, who had been the leader of Japanese communists in the United States and would become the chairman of the Japanese Communist Party after WW II (1958-82), when he was moved from the United States to Moscow to direct Japanese communists in the world, was probably involved in this mission.<sup>13</sup>

In Shanghai, there was also a group of Japanese leftist intellectuals under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Many of them belonged to the SMR Company, whose members were diffused throughout north China and Manchuria. Sorge admitted before prosecutors that Ozaki obviously had relations with them. Moreover, a Chinese researcher argues that Sorge's informants were to reach a hundred, and that Sorge and Zhou Enlai met in 1931.<sup>14</sup> Apparently, Ozaki, Sorge, Smedley and Ursula Kuczynski, who would be known later as the "Atomic Bomb Spy," were the nodes between both networks under the Comintern and the CCP.

Smedley would be the most important node connecting them. She was a very famous journalist and activist specializing in anti-British imperialism in India and anti-colonialism in China; she cooperated with the Comintern and with the GRU guided by Yan Berzin.<sup>15</sup> Ozaki was transferred to the Osaka Office of the Asahi Shimbun in 1932. According to Sorge's report to Moscow, in December 1932, Smedley invited Ozaki to Beijing and successfully persuaded him to cooperate with Sorge's spy ring.<sup>16</sup> Smedley likely said that the work was for the cause of international communism. Ozaki himself seemed to have believed that he had been working for the Comintern to the end. In September 1933, Sorge came to Tokyo. Sorge was also interested in academic research on Japanese society and

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<sup>12</sup> Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 71; John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> 加藤『ゾルゲ事件』、182-183頁 [Kato, *The Sorge Case*, pp. 182-183].

<sup>14</sup> 楊国光『ゾルゲ、上海ニ潜入ス:日本の大陸侵略と国際情報戦』社会評論社、2009年、74、76頁 [Yang Guoguang, *Sorge Came to Shanghai*, Tokyo: Shakaihyoronsha, 2009, p. 74, 76].

<sup>15</sup> Owen Matthews, *An Impeccable Spy: Richard Sorge, Stalin's Master Agent*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, p. 62.

<sup>16</sup> А.Г.Фешун, «Дело Зорге» телеграммы и письма (1930-1945), Центр гуманитарных инициатив, 2019 [Andrey Feshun, *The Sorge Case: Telegrams and Letters*, Moscow, 2019], p. 53.

politics. However, his boss at GRU, Berzin demanded military intelligence from "Ramsay" (Sorge's codename) as follows:

- a) specific coverage, with figures, of the work of the military plants;
- b) provision of raw materials and fuel;
- c) the condition of the railways and maritime transport;
- d) construction of warehouses, bases, equipment of shipment ports;
- e) the organization and condition of the air defense system;
- f) the condition of the Japanese countryside and the agrarian question.<sup>17</sup>

Besides Ozaki, Sorge had a devoted assistant in 1933; Yotoku Miyagi was a painter born in Okinawa, immigrated to the United States and entered the CPUSA. He presumably was trained and dispatched by the CPUSA under the guidance of the Comintern. In 1935, a highly skilled radiotelegraph operator, Max Clausen, also joined Sorge's ring by order of Moscow.

While working as a foreign correspondent for German newspapers, he approached the German embassy in Tokyo. In particular, Eugen Ott, who was a military attaché and then ambassador in 1938, was the most important source. Ott had served in a Japanese infantry regiment at Nagoya and had many friends in the Japanese army, in which Col. Takanobu Manaki was the chief of the German section of the General Staff. Sorge thus had much intelligence from Ott concerning the negotiations for the Anti-Comintern Pact signed in 1936. This negotiation, which had begun between the Nazis' unofficial diplomacy consultant Joachim von Ribbentrop and Japanese military attaché Maj. General Hiroshi Oshima in 1935, was completely penetrated by the Soviet NKVD spy ring orchestrated from the Hague station by Walter Krivitsky. In the Anti-Comintern Pact, there was a secret clause that Germany and Japan should not "entlasten" [reduce] the military pressure exerted from the frontier with both countries. Joseph Stalin, who was still immature on foreign affairs and fascinated by the political ability of Adolf Hitler since the Night of the Long Knives (the purge of the SA guided by Ernst Röhm), having grasped the whole picture of the Pact with the intelligence network, began

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<sup>17</sup> Фешун, «Дело Зорге» [Feshun, *The Sorge Case*], p. 79.

his desperate attempts to “Munich” [appease] Hitler.<sup>18</sup>

This attitude of Stalin would be conducive to the non-aggression pact [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact] in August 1939; then, Germany conducted a perfect surprise attack against the USSR in June 1941. In the Far East, the gap in military strength was an incentive for officers in the War Ministry and the General Staff to be allied with Nazi Germany. This trend resulted in the Tripartite Pact in 1940. At the same time, the Nazis offered a model of a new socio-economic regime for officers in the Japanese army. This movement led to the collapse of party politics and the New Structure headed by Fumimaro Konoye. In this sense, the Mukden Incident indubitably brought about a catalyst effect for the Second World War.

### 3. The “Decision” in the Summer of 1941

Richard Sorge’s spy ring is considered to have sent over 400 reports from Tokyo to Moscow through “Wiesbaden”—Vladivostok or Khabarovsk. Among them, the most valuable pieces of intelligence were supposedly the alarm for German invasion against the USSR in June and the expectation that the Japanese army would not attack Russia in the Far East in the summer of 1941. In the former, Sorge reported the starting date of war correctly. However, according to the Mitorokhin Archive brought to the West by former KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin, there were more than one hundred reports from the NKVD to Stalin suggesting a German invasion of Russia in 1941. There was also information from the GRU, including from Sorge.<sup>19</sup> However, Stalin did not believe that Hitler would attack Russia, and the military intelligence cadre replied that Sorge’s reports were doubtful. Only after Operation Barbarossa came into reality would Stalin acknowledge the validity of the intelligence from the Sorge ring.

The latter, that is, the decision of “not attacking” the USSR, has been deemed the most critical achievement of the Sorge spy ring. As Charles Willoughby, Chief of Intelligence on General MacArthur’s staff during World War II, acknowledged in his book *Shanghai Conspiracy* (1952), “Sorge was able to assure his superiors

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<sup>18</sup> Water Krivitsky, *In Stalin’s secret service: An exposé of Russia’s secret policies by the former chief of the Soviet intelligence in Western Europe*, 3rd edition, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Andrew, Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: the Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, pp. 92-93.

that there would be no attack: the Siberian divisions were entrained for the West and appeared on the Western Front for the successful defense of Moscow."<sup>20</sup> This has become the grounds for judging Sorge to be the greatest spy in the 20th century.

As I mentioned above, since the Japanese army had suffered from an inferiority in military strength against the USSR, war on the western front created the ideal moment to attack Russia and, in particular, to destroy crucial military facilities, such as airfields for large bombardment aircraft in south maritime Siberia.

By early June, the Japanese army and navy were informed by the Japanese ambassador to Germany, General Oshima, that the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia was inevitable. The army and navy thus reconsidered their predetermined policy after the outbreak of WW II, which was to advance to Southeast Asia to ensure natural resources, such as oil, rubber, tin, and rice in the Western colonies, and at the same time, to obtain air bases to attack Singapore.

To the Japanese military, the German-Soviet War was as an accelerative factor for advancing both to the South and to the North. Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka signed the Neutrality Treaty with Stalin on April 13, 1941, shortly after Ribbentrop and Hitler implied to him in official talks that Germany would go to war with Russia. For Matsuoka the neutrality treaty seemed to be nothing more than leverage for the negotiations with the United States, so he insisted on an attack on Russia in the Far East immediately after the start of war on June 22. However, the army and navy did not agree to change their predetermined policy. The Japanese government then reestablished the strategy at a conference held before the Emperor, which prioritized the Southbound on July 2, 1941.

The Japanese government issued an official statement that the highest decision was made before the Emperor. However, the decision included two policies: 1) advancing to South French Indochina; and 2) preparing in secrecy to attack the USSR in Siberia. The problem of "North or South" was ambiguous to the very end at the conference.

Sorge learned about this conference decision on July 2 from Ozaki, who was a special adviser of Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoye. On July 3, Sorge

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Willoughby, *Shanghai Conspiracy: The Sorge Spy Ring*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1952, p. 24.

transmitted a report as follows:

- 1) The German military attaché [Maj. General Alfred Kretschmer] told me that the Japanese General Staff is full of activities in view of the German offensive against the great enemy and the inevitability of the Red Army's defeat. He thinks that Japan will enter the war in no later than five weeks. The Japanese offensive will begin at Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Sakhalin, with an amphibious landing from Sakhalin.
- 2) Source Invest [Ozaki] thinks Japan will enter the war in six weeks. He also reported that the Japanese government has decided to remain faithful to the Tripartite Pact, but will also adhere to the Neutrality Pact with the USSR. It was decided to send three divisions to Saigon. Matsuoka, who previously insisted on attacking the USSR, agreed with this decision.
- 3) Sources of Intari [Miyagi] said that they had heard of strengthening the eastern border with some troops from northern China as well as reinforcing the troops in Hokkaido.<sup>21</sup>

The decision of the Imperial Conference was correctly reported in the second section; however, as it was attached with information from Kretschmer and Yotoku Miyagi, the focus became blurred. Rather, the mood of the General Staff and the information on the concentration of army units to the eastern border area may have created an imminent sense of threat of Japanese attack in Moscow. After his arrest, Sorge confessed that he was convinced that Japan's primary target was the "south" to prepare for occupying Singapore, and Japan would take a wait-and-see attitude for the "north"; he then immediately reported this to Moscow by radio wave.<sup>22</sup> In reality, Sorge's report accurately reflected the "indecision" between Northbound and Southbound.

The GRU headquarters' assessment of this report is unclear. According to some research, a GRU cadre handwrote on telegram paper that this report is trustworthy. However, there is no such telegram in the selection of Sorge's telegrams and

<sup>21</sup> Фесюн, «Дело Зорге» [Feshun, *The Sorge Case*], p. 365.

<sup>22</sup> 小尾俊人編『現代史資料1:ゾルゲ事件1』みすず書房, 1962年, 288頁 [Toshito Obi ed., *Contemporary Historical Materials 1: The Sorge Case*, vol. 1, Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1962, p. 288].

letters recently compiled by Andrey Feshun. Instead, there is a memorandum by Maj. General Konstantin Kolganov titled "The Origins of Political Distrust of INSON." Inson was also Sorge's codename. Kolganov stated that Sorge and his group in Tokyo could be sold out by Berzin, the former chief of GRU, and his company, who had already been purged by Stalin. Sorge's reports therefore must be cautiously reviewed alongside other sources. At this time, Kolganov was virtually at the top of the GRU, and Sorge's reports were too scarcely seen to be trusted.

The reason for the distrust of Richard Sorge among the cadres of GRU is open to various interpretations. First of all, Yan Berzin, who was already purged by Stalin on suspicion of betraying people, had recruited Sorge to the GRU. Second, Stalin may have been furious at Sorge's report on Genrikh Lyushkov, who had been the former NKVD chief in the Far East and defected via Manchukuo to Japan. Sorge supposedly attended the press conference in Tokyo, and reported to Moscow with no disguise on the Lyushkov's statement criticized Stalin's regime and revealed the reality of the Great Purge.<sup>23</sup> Third, the GRU headquarters knew that the British colonial secret police had discovered Sorge was a Soviet agent connected with the case of Hilaire Noulens, a spy of the Comintern in Shanghai in June 1931. In a report from 1936, an executive of the GRU charged that Sorge had committed numerous errors in Shanghai by having many connections with the local members of the Chinese Communist Party through Agnes Smedley.<sup>24</sup> Generally, the assessment of Richard Sorge was not very high. Furthermore, Stalin's suspicions of Sorge must have been reflected in the attitudes of the GRU leadership.

Let us return to the topic of July 1941. Two days after the decision, War Minister and very near future Prime Minister, Lt. General Hideki Tojyo said: "The policy with which Japan is going is still undetermined. It is sufficient to let both

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<sup>23</sup> 田嶋信雄「リュシコフ・リスナー・ゾルゲ:「満洲国」をめぐる日独ノ関係の側面」江夏由樹ほか編「近代中国東北地域史研究の一視角」山川出版社、2005年、191頁 [Nobuo Tajima, "Lyushkov, Lisner, Sorge: a relation between Japan, Germany and USSR around the 'Manchukuo'" in Yoshiki Enatsu et al. eds., *A Perspective of the Research of Modern Northeast China*, Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2005, p. 191].

<sup>24</sup> Фешун, «Дело Зорге» [Feshun, *The Sorge Case*], p. 102.

foreigners and Japanese long guess about Japan's policy.”<sup>25</sup>

The Japanese General Staff actually issued the order for vast mobilization, namely “Kantokuen,” on July 7. This military plan, made at the end of June, was to attack the USSR with 25 divisions in the northern and eastern border area. The primary targets were air fields for large bombers. At this moment, only 16 divisions were mobilized, but rear units, including logistic and communication units, corresponding to over 20 divisions were also transferred to Manchuria. Through this mobilization, the Kwantung Army would have strengthened from 330,000 to 850,000 people by the end of August. Given the climatic conditions, D-day had to have happened before the beginning of September.<sup>26</sup>

Under this circumstance, Sorge and his company were strained with the highest tension, and their intelligence activities reached the climactic moment because his greatest mission was to protect the Soviets from Japanese aggression in the Far East.

Sorge and Ozaki's spy ring maintained its intensive activities in August and September. While Ozaki obtained the highest-level information from the Konoye Cabinet, Miyagi gathered information on relocations of army troops. In early September, Ozaki went to Manchuria to conduct a close investigation and ask former colleagues at the Investigation Bureau of the SMR. Although, in his “confession,” Sorge stated that he was convinced of the abandonment of the “Northbound” by the end of August, the group seemed to have eagerly gathered military intelligence in Manchuria and kept reporting to Moscow, as described below.

On August 7, Sorge transmitted that the mobilization for the South and the North would be completed by the middle of August. On August 11, he reported that the General Staff would not stop the mobilization after severe economic sanctions imposed by the United States. As the General Staff may decide to attack the USSR without the consent of the Japanese government, the Soviet army

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<sup>25</sup> 波多野澄雄『幕僚たちの真珠湾』吉川弘文館、2013年、101頁 [Sumio Hatano, *Staff Officers' Pearl Harbor*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2013, p. 101].

<sup>26</sup> 防衛庁防衛研修所戦史室『戦史叢書 大東亜戦争開戦経緯(4)』朝雲新聞社、1974年、278-288頁 [NIDS, *Senshi Soshō: The Background before the Great East Asian War*, vol. 4, Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1974, pp. 278-288].

should remain maximally vigilant. On August 23, he reported that the Japanese strength in Manchuria amounted to 25-30 divisions, and there could still be an offensive in the Vladivostok area.<sup>27</sup>

On September 11, Sorge transmitted that German ambassador Ott had lost hope for the Japanese army to attack the USSR during the year 1941. On September 14, he reported that, according to Ozaki's analysis, Japan had probably abandoned the invasion of Siberia; at least 700,000 troops would be stationed in Manchuria in preparation for the aggression next spring. In addition, Ozaki told him that the USSR would be relieved from the scare of Japanese aggression after September 15. However, Kolganov, the head of the GRU, wrote a note that this intelligence should be carefully checked against other sources.<sup>28</sup>

On October 3, the main troops still remained in the eastern border area. The Kwantung Army ordered double tracking work between Mudanjiang and Suifenhe in the eastern border area and the construction of a railroad (200km) and auto route (300-400km) from Heihe along the Amur to the north in the northern border area. Furthermore, the Kwantung Army ordered the SMR Company to construct a secret railway from near Qiqihar to Oupuxiang (the city on the Amur across from Ushumun in the USSR). On October 4, Sorge transmitted that, due to the order of the Kwantung Army, the SMR Company had procured 3,000 railroad cars from north China and started moving 50 million tons of military transportation in 40 days, but that the amount was gradually reduced. He said this meant the abandonment of aggression by the end of the coming winter. Moreover, in the first week of mobilization in early July, the Kwantung Army ordered the SMR Company to recruit 3,000 skilled engineers for the army with the intent to confiscate and rebuild the Trans-Siberian railway from broad gauge to standard gauge. The number of requested engineers was soon reduced to 1,500 and, at last,

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<sup>27</sup> Фесюн, «Дело Зорге» [Feshun, *The Sorge Case*], p. 366, 369, 371, 381.

<sup>28</sup> Фесюн, «Дело Зорге» [Feshun, *The Sorge Case*], pp. 386-387, 393-394.

to 50 in the middle of September.<sup>29</sup>

In early September, Sorge and his company would be convinced that Japan's attack in the Far East would not occur in 1941. Nevertheless, they kept reporting until just before their arrest by the Japanese police.

## Conclusion: Between Distrust and Indecision

Since the occupation of Saigon after the negotiation with Vichy France invoked the severe economic sanctions of the United States, Japan headed for war in the Pacific. Lt. General Shinichi Tanaka, former Chief of Operations of the General Staff, recollected that when he had set the date for the Pearl Harbor attack, December 8, 1941, he took into consideration the preparation for the attack against Russia in the spring of 1942. In the war plan of the army, after the operations in Hawaii, Singapore and the Philippines, with acquisition of natural resources from Southeast Asia, Japan would take a defensive arrangement. However, after succeeding in the attack at Pearl Harbor and the occupation of Singapore, the army and the navy did not agree with the goal of the second stage of the Pacific War. This means that the army and the navy did not have any agreement or common conceptions about the war against the United States and Britain.

In 1940 and 1941, it is said that various decisions were made with each sectional interest reflecting the pro and con arguments. In consequence, the national policy became very much like "student essays." The Japanese government remained in a state of indecision and fell onto the path to war against the United States.<sup>30</sup> Although there was no clear and immediate crisis between the two countries,

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<sup>29</sup> Фесюн, «Дело Зорге» [Feshun, *The Sorge Case*], pp. 395-396. This information is also confirmed by the Ota Taizo Papers in the National Diet Library, Japan. Ota was a prosecutor for the Sorge case. The information in the Ota Papers was provided for verification by the Prosecutor's Office to the Soldiers Affairs Bureau of the War Ministry, which oversaw the military police. Although the military police (the Kenpeitai) had suspicions about Sorge and his ring, they hesitated to step in for the investigation in consideration for SS Colonel Josef Meisinger, the Gestapo liaison at the German Embassy.

<sup>30</sup> 角田順『太平洋戦争への道 7:日米開戦』朝日新聞社、1963年[Tsunoda Jun, *The Way to the Pacific War 7: the Outbreak of War against the United States*, Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1963]; 森山優『日本はなぜ開戦に踏み切ったか』新潮社、2012年[Atsushi Moriyama, *Why Japan Went Ahead with the War*, Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2012].

the many talks in Washington led to the revelation of fundamental antagonisms concerning future concepts in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite the myth of Sorge as the greatest spy in the 20th century, there is no proof that Sorge's intelligence did affect the strategic decisions of the USSR. Taking the Kwantung Army's defiance in 1931 into consideration, Moscow would not feel relieved until Pearl Harbor in December 1941. As far as the military strength in Siberia is concerned, there would be no grand-scale relocation to Moscow before winter in 1941.<sup>31</sup>

One thing is certain: Sorge, who was stuck between the indecision in Tokyo and the distrust from Moscow, completed his mission.

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<sup>31</sup> 林三郎『関東軍と極東ソ連軍』芙蓉書房、1976年、214頁 [Saburo Hayashi, *The Kwantung Army and the Far Eastern Soviet Army*, Tokyo: Fuyo Shobo, 1976, p. 214].