

CHAPTER 8

From the Offensive to the Defensive: Japanese Strategy During the Pacific War, 1942-44

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Japan initiated the Pacific War by declaring war on the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek in December 1941. Less than four years later, the war ended in Japan's total defeat. Much of the Japanese research on the causes of Japan's defeat tends to be deterministic and emphasizes the disparity in industrial capabilities and other aspects of national power between the Allies, in particular the United States, and Japan. While the difference in industrial capabilities was clearly a factor which affected the war's outcome, many of the strategic decisions made by Japan during the war also played an important role in ensuring that Japan would not overcome its industrial weaknesses. In other words, Japan's ultimate defeat was also contingent on Japan's wartime decisions, and these decisions should be examined in order to more fully understand why Japan could not overcome or even partially remedy its disadvantage in national power or industrial capabilities and ultimately lost the war.

One factor which played a major role in Japan's ultimate defeat was the strong rivalry between the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and Navy (IJN). Interservice rivalries were not peculiar to the Japanese, but the rivalry between the IJA and IJN is striking because it repeatedly affected Japan's major wartime decisions regarding strategy. This report shall examine two major strategic wartime decisions made by Japan. The first is the strategy for the Second Stage Operations, which was adopted in March 1942. The second is the strategy commonly called the Absolute National Defense Zone Concept, which was adopted in September 1943. The IJA and IJN's interservice rivalry greatly affected the content and execution of the two strategies, both of which ultimately made Japan's strategic situation worse. A study of these two strategic decisions will therefore enable one to understand better how Japan's interservice rivalry was a factor other than Japan's overall industrial capability which led to Japan's defeat.

For various reasons, in July 1940 Japan adopted a national policy of expanding

southwards even at the risk of war with the western powers.¹ The adoption of this “Southward Advance” policy was noteworthy because it marked the first time that the IJA agreed to such an advance, into Southeast Asia, which traditionally had been considered to be the IJN’s geographical area of responsibility, and which would involve fighting against America, which traditionally had been the IJN’s primary hypothetical enemy.²

The IJA’s immediate interest in Southeast Asia was to seize the resource rich area of the Netherlands East Indies and Malaya. The natural resources available there were deemed necessary to fight what had become an increasingly protracted war in China, which started in 1937 and was ongoing. It is important to note that even after December 1941, the IJA’s strategic priority continued to be the prosecution of its war in China, and the advancement of preparations for a future war with the Soviet Union, which was its traditional enemy.³ Within the framework of the situation after December 1941, the IJA was interested in forcing the United Kingdom to capitulate, as a means of forcing Chiang Kai-shek to lose hope and capitulate as well. The IJA therefore was interested in defeating the British in Malaya, Singapore, and Burma, and possibly driving on into India. Specifically, the IJA felt that the assault and capture of Singapore was the most important part of the entire Southern Operation.⁴

The IJA therefore deployed all ten divisions which were specifically assigned

¹ For an examination of Japan’s diplomatic and military policies leading up to the Pacific War, see, for example, Richard B. Frank, *Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia-Pacific War July 1937-May 1942* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2020); and Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942* (W. W. Norton and Company, 2012).

² Details of how the IJA and IJN came to claim their traditional areas of operational responsibility and hypothetical enemies can be found in, for example, Edward J. Drea, *Japan’s Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853 – 1945* (University Press of Kansas, 2009); and David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy 1887 – 1941* (Naval Institute Press, 1997).

³ On December 8, 1941, the IJA consisted of fifty numbered divisions, plus a division-sized “Cavalry Group.” Of these, only ten were specifically assigned to the Southern Operation, while twenty-two were deployed against China, thirteen were deployed in Manchuria, and six were stationed in the Home Islands, Taiwan, and Korea. (One of the divisions deployed in China, the 38th, took part in the assault on Hong Kong, and is often counted as a division taking part in the Southern Operation. In that case, the IJA committed eleven divisions to the initial operation in Southeast Asia.) Takushiro Hattori, *Daitoa-Senso Zenshi* (Complete History of the Great East Asia War) (Hara Shobo, 1950), table on pp. 194-95.

⁴ Kumao Imoto, *Daitoa-Senso Sakusen Nisshi* (Great East Asia War Operations Diary) (Fuyo Shobo, 1998), p. 77.

to the Southern Operation to operations in Malaya; the Philippines; Borneo, Sumatra, Java; and the remainder of the Netherlands East Indies.⁵ While Japan also undertook operations in the Pacific Ocean, namely Guam, Wake, and Rabaul, at the start of the Pacific War, the IJA (as well as the IJN) considered the area east of the Philippines to be the IJN's area of responsibility. The IJA therefore made only a minimal commitment to operations in the central and southern Pacific Ocean, centered around the South Seas Detachment, which was a force centered on the 144th Infantry Regiment (whose parent division, the 55th, was involved in the Burma campaign), and which was to cooperate with the IJN in the taking of Guam, and later, Rabaul.⁶

Despite these interservice differences, the Southern Operation (or First Stage Operations) was executed relatively smoothly, and was successfully concluded in early to mid-March 1942 with the occupation of Java. Interservice friction was not a major factor in the Southern Operation because the IJA and IJN agreed on its strategic objective, which was to secure the oil wells and other natural resources of the so-called Southern Resource Area and to eliminate the major American and British military bases in the region.⁷

The rivalry between the IJA and IJN, however, clearly affected Japan's strategy and conduct of the war after spring of 1942. The November 1941 strategy called for the quick seizure of the Southern Resources Area and destruction of the American, British, and Dutch bases of operation in the area, followed by the establishment of a "Long Term, Undefeatable Posture." In other words, Japan was to shift to a defensive strategy after the conclusion of the Southern Operation. The British were to be defeated with Germany's help, and Chiang forced to capitulate. An impregnable defensive perimeter was to be established which encompassed all of Japan's newly acquired territory, and the inevitable American counteroffensive was to be thrown back somewhere along this perimeter. The IJA

⁵ Hattori, table on pp. 194-95.

⁶ Boeicho Boeikenshusho Senshishitsu, *Senshi Sosho Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun Sakusen (1) Port Moresbi Ga-to Shoki Sakusen* (South Pacific Army Operations (1) Port Moresby and Early Guadalcanal Operations) (Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1968), p. 7. It is instructive to note that as late as August 1941, the IJA General Staff opposed the use of the South Seas Detachment in the assault on Rabaul, because it felt that such distant operations exceeded the IJA's capabilities. *Ibid.*

⁷ Imoto, p. 115.

and IJN's leadership hoped that America would be disheartened by the loss of the British and Chiang as its allies, and would lose the will to continue the war against Japan when soundly defeated along the defensive perimeter.⁸

Both services had agreed to this strategy when it was adopted in November 1941. Unfortunately for Japan, the IJA and IJN had not agreed beforehand where the defensive perimeter was to be established. Thus, when the two services began studying their options for the so-called Second Stage Operations, the different views held on the Pacific War by the IJA and IJN came to the forefront. The IJA General Staff wanted to follow the November 1941 strategy, and curtail major offensive operations against the Americans. Within the framework of the Pacific War, the IJA was interested in continuing operations aimed at the defeat of the British, and considered ground and air operations in Burma and India, a part of which were eventually carried out. Other than those operations, however, the IJA wished to carry out its prewar plans of downsizing its commitment to the Southern Resources Area by withdrawing six divisions from Southeast Asia and redeploying four to the Home Islands, and one each to China and Manchuria.⁹ In other words, the IJA wished to renew its efforts to win the war in China as soon as possible, and to focus again on preparations for an eventual war with the Soviet Union.¹⁰

Meanwhile, the IJN became divided within itself regarding its preference for the Second Stage Operations. The Naval General Staff was in agreement in principle with the IJA regarding the need for the establishment of a strong defensive perimeter after the conclusion of the First Stage Operations. However, the Naval General Staff differed with the IJA General Staff regarding where this perimeter should be drawn. Since the Americans were traditionally the IJN's primary hypothetical enemy, the IJN had carefully studied the Americans for years, and were acutely aware of the differences in industrial potential or capacity between Japan and America. The Naval General Staff therefore understood that it could not win a long, protracted war with the Americans, which would enable the

⁸ Hattori, pp. 164-65.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-16.

¹⁰ Boeicho Boeikenshusho Senshishitsu, *Senshi Sosho Daihonei Rikugunbu (3) Showa 17-Nen 4-Gatsu made* (IGHQ Army Section (3) Until April 1942) (Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1970), p. 469.

Americans to outproduce the Japanese and eventually overwhelm the Japanese with superior material strength. However, the Naval General Staff also understood that there was no good way to force America to fight a short war, in which lay the only hope for a Japanese victory, and so went along, somewhat halfheartedly, with the IJA's insistence on the establishment of a strong defensive perimeter, even though the adoption of such a strategy might result in the long and protracted war against the Americans which the Naval General Staff wanted to avoid.¹¹

When studying its options for the Second Stage Operations, therefore, the Naval General Staff continued to agree in principle with the need to establish a "Long Term, Holding Posture," but differed with the IJA General Staff on where to draw the perimeter. The Naval General Staff argued that local offensive operations should be continued, even if the overall strategy against the Americans shifted to the strategic defensive. The Naval General Staff felt that the defensive perimeter should be pushed farther outwards in certain key areas, in order to maintain the initiative in the war and to keep the Americans on the defensive, which would keep them from regrouping and preparing for a counteroffensive.¹² The Naval General Staff therefore advocated offensive operations in the South Pacific, aimed at Australia or the sea lines of communication between America and Australia. Not only was the Naval General Staff concerned about the possibility of Australia becoming a base for any Allied counteroffensive into the Southern Resources Area, but also felt that the United Kingdom would suffer a fatal blow if Australia (and India) could be knocked out of the war. In addition, the Naval General Staff hoped that by continuing the offensive in the South Pacific, the Americans might be forced to commit their battle fleet, which at that time consisted of the three aircraft carriers which had survived Pearl Harbor. If the Americans would commit their aircraft carriers to the defense of Australia or the sea lines of communication to the South Pacific, the IJN could fight the Decisive Fleet Battle, which had traditionally been the centerpiece of its war plans against America.

Within the IJN, however, the Combined Fleet staff, in particular Admiral

¹¹ Boeicho Boeikenshusho Senshishitsu, *Senshi Sosho Daihonei Kaigunbu Rengo Kantai (2) Showa 17-Nen 6-Gatsu made* (IGHQ Navy Section and Combined Fleet (2) Until June 1942) (Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1975), pp. 239-40.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 247-49, 294-99.

Isoroku Yamamoto, its commander-in-chief, argued for a different set of operations for the Second Stage. Yamamoto, who felt he understood the Americans very well, had no faith in the efficacy of the November 1941 strategy, which was essentially a defensive strategy. He felt a reliance on any “Long Term, Holding Posture” would only result in a long war which Japan could not win. To that extent, he shared the reservations of the Naval General Staff. However, Yamamoto also did not believe that the Americans would consider a Japanese thrust against their sea lines of communication or Australia to be enough of a threat to require the commitment of their remaining aircraft carriers. He also did not believe that cutting the South Pacific sea lines of communication would result in a war that was short enough to enable Japan to win, i.e. cutting the SLOC, while not meaningless, would still result in a long war. Instead of these options, Yamamoto felt that the only way Japan could shorten the war was to win consecutive major battles against the Americans that would shock American public opinion into accepting some sort of settlement with Japan. Yamamoto had strongly advocated the Pearl Harbor operation against the opposition of the Naval General Staff in part because he hoped a smashing victory there would have such a “shock effect.” He therefore argued for a major thrust eastwards in the Central Pacific, against Hawaii, as Japan’s Second Stage Operations. However, the Combined Fleet staff opposed a thrust against Hawaii in mid-1942, because the IJN’s carrier air power could not be strengthened sufficiently by then. Meanwhile, Yamamoto and his staff became increasingly concerned over the possibility of American carrier air raids against the Japanese Home Islands, and felt that the Japanese perimeter should be pushed eastwards, to Midway. Thus, Yamamoto’s Hawaii operation was put on hold, and the Combined Fleet advocated a thrust to Midway as the focus of Second Stage Operations.¹³

From January 1942, the two General Staffs began debating the Second Stage Operations. The Naval General Staff proposed an invasion of Australia. The IJA refused, because such an operation would require the commitment of an

¹³ Ibid., pp. 299-301, 339-40. It is important to note that the Combined Fleet staff advocated the Midway operation even before its fears were realized by the Doolittle Raid of April 18. It is also important to note that the Midway operation which was conceived was not intended to be a steppingstone towards an eventual assault of Hawaii. Ibid.

additional ten to twelve divisions, and would further detract from the IJA's desire to renew its focus on the Asian mainland.¹⁴ The Naval General Staff also proposed an expansion into the Solomon Islands, and on to Fiji and Samoa, in order to cut the U.S.-Australia SLOC. The IJN assured the IJA that the IJN's Special Naval Landing Forces could carry the burden of such an operation and that the IJA need only to cooperate by committing nine or ten infantry battalions. The IJA did recognize the strategic value of removing the threat of Australia becoming a base for a counteroffensive into the Southern Resources Area, and therefore agreed with the latter proposal, which was named Operation FS, because it required only a minimal commitment of IJA forces.¹⁵

However, the two services could not settle their differences on which axis of operations Japan should place priority for its Second Stage Operations. The interservice debates on this issue escalated into a larger debate on how Japan should prosecute the Second Stage of the war, and resulted in an agreement on March 7, 1942 which was titled "Guidelines on the Future Prosecution of the War."¹⁶ This decision settled none of the questions regarding priority of operations. The key sentence read that Japan would "continue to expand its current military successes and establish a long term, undefeatable political and military posture, while executing positive measures when the opportunity presents itself."¹⁷ The IJA General Staff, Naval General Staff, and Combined Fleet (Yamamoto) each interpreted the strategy to suit their respective needs. Thus, the IJA decided to establish the long term, undefeatable posture by transitioning to the strategic defensive and downsizing their forces in Southeast Asia, and to recommit to the war in China and to preparations for war against the Soviets. The Naval General Staff felt it was authorized to continue offensive operations and expand into the South Pacific. Meanwhile, the Combined Fleet staff felt its proposals to push eastward against Midway had been approved.¹⁸

As a result, Japan's strategic efforts split into three major axes: the Asian

¹⁴ *Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun Sakusen (1)*, pp. 123-26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-28.

¹⁶ *Daihonei Rikugunbu (3)*, p. 517.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 517-18.

mainland (China and Manchuria), the South Pacific, and Midway. The Japanese thus dispersed their assets instead of concentrating them against their materialistically superior enemies. Unfortunately for Japan, each of these axes of operations were defeated. The thrust into the South Pacific was first defeated in the Coral Sea battle in May. The eastwards offensive against Midway was defeated in June 1942. The loss of Japanese offensive naval power at Midway ultimately resulted in the cancellation of Operation FS, and the entire Japanese thrust into the South Pacific was ultimately defeated by the campaigns on New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands from August 1942 through early 1944. Meanwhile, the IJA had to cancel its plans for starting a major offensive in China.

Following the twin defeats at Guadalcanal and Buna, the Japanese had to shift to the strategic defensive. During the first half of 1943, the IJA and IJN debated the specifics of the strategy they had to take, now that they were on the defensive. The biggest issue was where to draw the main defensive line, especially in the South Pacific. The IJA argued for pulling back to Bougainville Island in the Solomons, and the Lae-Salamaua area on the northeast coast of New Guinea. The IJA wanted to avoid a repeat of their experiences on Guadalcanal, where they felt large ground forces had been forced to fight on an island which was too distant for the Japanese to supply adequately. This feeling was reinforced by the defeat on Attu Island, in the Aleutian Islands, where the Japanese had been unable to reinforce or resupply their garrison, which fought and died to the last man in May 1943.¹⁹

In comparison, the IJN wished to fight as far forward as possible. In the South Pacific, the IJN was primarily concerned with maintaining the viability of Rabaul as its most important forward base in the area, which required that the fighting be kept as far away from it as possible. The IJN therefore argued for defending the Central Solomons, in other words, New Georgia Island, instead of withdrawing to the Northern Solomons, as the IJA wished.²⁰

In the end, the IJA and IJN once again agreed by adopting both proposals

¹⁹ Hattori, p. 413.

²⁰ Boeicho Boeikenshusho Senshishitsu, *Senshi Soshō Minami Taiheiyo Rikugun Sakusen (3) Munda, Salamaua* (Army Operations in the South Pacific (3) Munda and Salamaua) (Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1970), pp. 169-70.

rather than giving priority to one of them. In the “Army-Navy Central Agreement Regarding Southeast Area Operations” of March 22, 1943, the IJN would defend New Georgia with its Special Naval Landing Forces, while the IJA would defend Bougainville.²¹

This conflict between the IJA and IJN on where to place the main line of resistance repeated itself on a larger scale over the entire Pacific Ocean area. In the Central Pacific, the IJN wanted to defend the Marshall and Gilbert Islands, which were the outermost chain of islands held by the Japanese and marked the easternmost extent of their territory as late as the fall of 1943. The IJN’s primary concern was to maintain the viability of Truk, located in the Caroline Islands, as its main forward base in the area. In order to maintain Truk’s effectiveness as a forward base, the IJN believed that the Marshall and Gilbert Islands had to be held, i.e. be the main line of defense, in order to keep the actual fighting away from Truk.²²

Meanwhile, the IJA did not want to defend a perimeter which was beyond Japan’s logistics capability and felt that the main line of defense in the Central Pacific should be drawn further to the west, but could not decide how far back the new perimeter should be drawn, nor when the current perimeter should be pulled back. The IJA General Staff repeatedly studied and debated this issue from the spring of 1943, but had reached no conclusion by the end of July.²³

The issue of where to draw the main line of defense thus remained unresolved when the Americans resumed their counteroffensive in the South Pacific in late June and early July 1943, at New Georgia in the Solomons, and against the Lae-Salamaua area on New Guinea. The Japanese quickly found themselves unable to adequately resupply and reinforce both areas. This was the same problem they had faced in the earlier battles on Guadalcanal and on the Kokoda Track, and at Attu. The question of the new main defensive perimeter thus required an immediate

²¹ Ibid., p. 170.

²² Boeicho Boeikenshusho Senshishitsu, *Senshi Sosho Daihonei Kaigunbu Rengo Kantai (4) Dai Sandan Sakusen Zenki* (IGHQ Navy Section and Combined Fleet (4) Early Period, Third Stage Operations) (Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1970), p. 311.

²³ Hiroyuki Shindo, “The Japanese Army’s Search for a New South Pacific Strategy, 1943,” in Peter Dean, ed., *Australia 1943: The Liberation of New Guinea* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 75-80.

decision. By mid-August, the IJN and IJA more or less were in agreement, and the line was formally approved in September by the “New Operations Guidance Policy.” This has informally been called the Absolute National Defense Zone concept. The strategic planners of the IJA and IJN determined the area that Japan absolutely had to hold in order to win the war, and the defensive perimeter was drawn to encompass this area. The line ran down the eastern side of the Kuriles, the Japanese Home Islands, Ogasawaras, Marianas, and cut through the Caroline Islands, then ran between Dutch New Guinea and Papua New Guinea, before curving west and encircling all of the Dutch East Indies and Malaya, and ended by running up between Burma and India.

The establishment of a new “Main Line of Defense” was incorporated into a comprehensive strategy for fighting and winning the war under the strategic conditions of mid-1943. The Army and Navy General Staffs agreed on the so-called “New Operations Guidance Policy” on September 15, and the military strategy was incorporated into a new national policy, which an Imperial Conference approved on September 30, 1943. The military aspects of the new policy were as follows. The Japanese decided to reinforce their defenses along the new main line of defense. Considerable forces were still fighting outside of that line, such as the 8th Area Army in the Solomon Islands and eastern New Guinea, but they were to fight a “Holding Operation.” In other words, they were to buy time by fighting and withdrawing as necessary. On the other hand, they were essentially not to be reinforced any further. Meanwhile, forces for mounting a massive counteroffensive against the Americans were to be built up behind the new main line of defense, with air forces to be given priority. These forces would then launch a decisive counteroffensive eastwards, in the Central or South Pacific, sometime in the second half of 1944.²⁴

The IJA, which had not fully committed to the war in the Pacific Ocean area, and against the Americans, until late 1942 and early 1943, thus finally began transferring major ground forces from what had heretofore been its primary area of concern, i.e. Manchuria, to the islands of the Central Pacific. Ironically, by

²⁴ Hattori, pp. 498-99. Saburo Hayashi, *Taiheiyo Senso Rikusen Gaishi* (Overview of History of Ground Operations in the Pacific War) (Iwanami Shoten, 1951), pp. 117-18.

the time the new strategy was adopted, i.e. fall of 1943, the IJN was considering the abandonment of Truk, its forward base in the Central Pacific. The IJN, and especially Combined Fleet headquarters, had become increasingly concerned about the vulnerability to air attack, of any of its surface forces which might be based in Truk.²⁵ Additionally, as 1943 neared its end and American submarines increased their effectiveness against Japanese shipping, the IJN faced increasing difficulty in supplying Truk with sufficient fuel oil to enable fleets based at Truk to operate. By early 1944, the IJN was seriously considering pulling its surface forces back from Truk to Palau or even further westwards, as far back as Borneo, in order to place them closer to the sources of oil.²⁶ An American reconnaissance flight over Truk on January 7 was taken as an indication that a major air raid was imminent. This hastened the final decision, and the IJN sent the bulk of its surface forces out from Truk to the Palau Islands, Tawi Tawi, and elsewhere, from late January through mid-February.²⁷ Therefore, even as the IJA began its major effort to reinforce the ground defenses of the Central Pacific, the IJN was abandoning Truk, the defense of which was ostensibly the key reason why the IJA's ground forces were required in the area.

In the end, the "Absolute National Defense Zone" concept did not produce any meaningful results for the Japanese, and failed when the new line of defense was breached at Hollandia in May 1944, and at Saipan after the Marianas Campaign of June-August 1944. There are many reasons for the failure of this strategy, such as the fact that it was based on aircraft production goals which were impossible to begin with, given the actual amounts of raw materials the Japanese had access to. The rivalry between the IJA and IJN, which is the focus of this report, also played a large role. Although the IJN had agreed in principle to the concept of the new main line of defense, which stipulated that areas outside of the line were not to be reinforced further and essentially left to their own resources, the IJN did not give up the idea of defending the Marshall and Eastern Caroline Islands

²⁵ Boeicho Boeikenshusho Senshishitsu, *Senshi Soshō Daihonei Kaigunbu Rengo Kantai (5) Dai San-dan Sakusen Chuki* (IGHQ Navy Section and Combined Fleet (5) Middle Period, Third Stage Operations) (Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1974), pp. 223-26.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 226-27.

either, even after the new strategy had been agreed upon.²⁸ The IJA thus found itself in a quandary. Once the new strategy had been agreed upon, the IJA viewed the Mariana Islands as the most vital part of the new defense line, and wanted to give top priority to their reinforcement. However, by the fall of 1943, the IJA was also very aware of the perilous state of the IJN's defensive preparations in the Marshall Islands. Faced with the IJN's continued efforts to strongly hold the Marshalls, the IJA finally decided that it could not abandon the IJN to its fate, and very reluctantly decided to send its forces which it had intended to redeploy from Manchuria to the Marianas and Western Caroline Islands to the Marshalls and Eastern Caroline Islands instead. As a result, by January 1944, approximately forty infantry battalions and other forces which were to have been used to strengthen the defenses of the Marianas and other points along the new perimeter were sent outside of that line, to the Marshalls and Eastern Caroline Islands, where most of them were lost or cut off and isolated after the Americans carried out their campaign against the Marshalls from the end of January 1944.²⁹

The IJA redeployed a further thirty infantry battalions and other forces to the Marianas and Western Carolines from February 1944 onwards, but the delay in the sending of such substantial forces to the Marianas, meant that the defensive preparations in the Marianas were greatly delayed. Along with a number of other factors, this led to the Japanese defeat on Saipan, Guam, and Tinian Islands in the Marianas Campaign of June-August 1944 and the quick breaching of the new defensive perimeter.³⁰

This paper has examined Japan's strategic decisions in the spring of 1942 and the fall through winter of 1943, and the role played by the interservice rivalry between the IJA and IJN. The decisions in 1942 affected how Japan would exploit its militarily advantageous situation. The 1943 decisions, on the other hand, were supposed to enable Japan to cope with its increasingly deteriorating strategic situation. In the former, the interservice rivalry resulted in a strategy which dispersed Japan's assets and led to their piecemeal defeat. In the latter, the interservice rivalry ensured that the Absolute National Defense Zone could

²⁸ Hattori, p. 499.

²⁹ Imoto, pp. 490-93.

³⁰ Hattori, pp. 501-2.

not be sufficiently defended. While Japan's materialistic inferiority vis a vis the Americans certainly was a major cause for Japan's ultimate defeat, these two examples show that Japan's interservice rivalry, among other factors, also played a major role in determining the ultimate outcome of the war in the Pacific.