

CHAPTER 9

Japanese Termination of the Pacific War: The Significant 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 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.¹

In order to address the question of why Japan took an approach quite different from Germany’s toward termination of 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 of an American invasion of the Japanese Home Islands.

Japan’s War Objectives

The imperial conference convened on June 8, 1945 approved the “Basic Policy for the Future Direction of the War.” The Japanese army’s original draft, reflecting its hardline policy of resisting to the very end, stated that “the Japanese Empire will prosecute the war to the end in order to preserve the national polity and protect the imperial land (the Home Islands), and thereby secure the foundations for the further development of the race.”²

¹ For an overview of the studies on the end of the war, see, for example, the 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 to the discussion on the atomic bombings and the end of the war, see Michael Kort, “Hiroshima to Rekishika: Shusei Shugi no Kobo” [Historians and Hiroshima: The rise and fall of revisionism], trans. Sadao Asada, *Doshisha Hogaku* [The Doshisha Law Review] 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 (Vol. II)] (Tokyo: Kodansha Bunko, 1986), 140–41.

The basic policy adopted read as follows: “With the belief in giving seven lives 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, 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: “to 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 “preservation of the national polity” and “defense of the imperial land.” This had two important meanings for Japan’s approach to 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 “imperial land” were preserved, especially the former, and that the war would be fought to 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 cabinet secretary, 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

³ Ibid., 170.

⁴ *Shusen no Hyojo (Suzuki Kantaro Jutsu)* [Features of the termination of the war as told by Kantaro Suzuki] (Tokyo: Rodo Bunkasha, 1946), 26.

end of the war.”⁵

The army, while agreeing to limit Japan’s war objectives, 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 “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 “preservation of the national polity” through diplomatic negotiations before the Home Islands were invaded, the army felt that it could be ensured only by dealing one major blow and attaining certain victory in a battle for the Home Islands.

Strategic Surrender: The Politics of Victory and Defeat is a classic work on the termination of war by Paul Kecskemeti of the RAND Corporation, published in 1958. The book undertakes theoretical analyses of the forms of war termination, comparing the experiences of Japan, Germany, and Italy. Kecskemeti notes that “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 Japanese leaders arrived at a shared understanding that Japan’s core value, preservation of the “national polity,” was a war objective, guidelines for realizing the termination of the war became clearer. The question was how to achieve this objective—through military force or negotiations?

Secondly, the principle of “building the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” underscored at the Greater East Asia Conference in 1943, was eliminated from Japan’s list of war objectives, and this served to further facilitate termination

⁵ Hisatsune Sakomizu, *Shusen no Shinso* [The truth of the end of the war] (Self-published, 1955), 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), 223–25.

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

of the war. In other words, as long as a principle such as the building of a co-prosperity sphere was a war objective, compromise between the two sides was difficult, and therefore, it was likely that the war would 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, 1945. This absolved Japan from the need to continue showing good faith towards Germany by observing the Axis Pact and refraining from a separate peace that had been used as an argument against such a separate peace with the Allies. Second, as it became increasingly apparent that Japan was losing the battle in Okinawa, for which expectations had been high, there was growing momentum for pursuing an immediate peace rather than making peace after striking the enemy a severe blow.

For example, according to the declassified *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku* [Annals of Emperor Showa], which is a biography of Emperor Showa compiled by the Imperial Household Agency, Foreign Minister Togo reported on April 30, 1945 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."⁹

Germany's war was of a different nature from Japan's. It was a "war of annihilation" (*Vernichtungskrieg*) in which the survival of the race and an ideology was at stake. Because it was founded on a powerful principle, or ideology, it was a war of victory or destruction, and peace through compromise was out of the question.¹⁰

This kind of ideology surfaced in an extreme way in the last stage of the

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

⁹ The Imperial Household Agency, *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku (9)* [Annals of Emperor Showa (9)] (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 2016), 657.

¹⁰ For a recent work discussing the characteristics of Nazism and war, see Richard Bessel, *Nachisu no Senso 1918–1949: Minzoku to Jinshu no Tatakai* [Nazism and war], trans. Akira Oyama (Tokyo: Chuko-Shinsho, 2015).

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. In Hitler’s words: “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 directed at Germany itself, that is, at the annihilation of Germany.¹¹

Incidentally, in the emperor’s second “imperial decision,” made during a meeting of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War on August 14, 1945, he 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.”¹² This decision is symbolic of the differences between the Japanese and German political situation and political leaders at the time.

Japan-U.S. Relations

Second, I focus on the factors underlying 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 peace between their country and the United States from early in the war. For example, on the very day of the attack on Pearl Harbor, former prime minister Konoe Fumimaro 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

¹¹ Sebastian Haffner, *Hitora towa Nanika* [The meaning of Hitler], trans. Tatsuo Akabane (Tokyo: Soshisha Publishing, 1979), 188–96.

¹² Kainan Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi* [The secret history of the end of war] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 1985), 140.

conduct this study.”¹³ In January of the following year, 1942, Konoe stressed to Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Koichi Kido that the timing of the termination of the war should be considered as quickly as possible. On February 5 of that year, Kido advised the emperor that: “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.” On February 12, 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.”¹⁴

The tide of the war subsequently turned against Japan. Thus, from around the summer of 1943, key figures came together to promote efforts to end the war, under the leadership of a number of former prime ministers, including Konoe 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 the entire cabinet’s resignation.

In addition, recent research indicates that even among mainstream army officers, whose views had been seen as monolithic, there were groups that aimed to achieve peace quickly. Many of these officers were assigned to the War Direction Section of the general staff.¹⁵

In Germany there was sporadic resistance, including the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt against Hitler. However, partly because many anti-Nazi Germans were in exile, such as Willy Brandt, who later became prime minister,

¹³ *Kataritsugu Showashi: Gekido no Hanseiki (3)* [Stories of the history of the Showa period: A tumultuous half century (3)] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1976), 304.

¹⁴ Kido Nikki Kenkyukai, ed., *Kido Koichi Kankei Bunsho* [Documentation relating to Koichi Kido] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press: 1966), 43–45.

¹⁵ 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).

Germany lacked a wide range of groups or movements in the political mainstream that explored ways of achieving peace to avoid a catastrophe, as occurred in Japan. Nor was there a movement within the German army that 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.¹⁶

As for the Americans, the so-called “pro-Japanese” officials played a significant role. An example is State Department official Joseph C. Grew, who formerly served as under secretary of state. In speeches 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 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 imperial 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 promoted the sound development of Japan.¹⁷

During the war, these officials had an enormous impact on policymaking and moderated U.S. policies toward 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 according to the terms of surrender, support would be provided to democratic and moderate persons who remained in Japan and that the occupation forces would stand ready to assist with the country’s democratization. This varied significantly from the hardline stance in the United States that sought severe measures, including

¹⁶ Yasushi Yamaguchi, “Hitora to Doitsu Kokubogun: Mujoken Kofuku eno Michi” [Hitler and the German military: The path to unconditional surrender], in *Showashi no Gunbu to Seiji (4) Dainijitaisen to Gunbu Dokusai* [Military and politics in Showa history (4): World War II and military dictatorship], ed., Masaki Miyake (Tokyo: Dai-Ichi Hoki, 1983), 216–24.

¹⁷ For the activities of the pro-Japanese officials, 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).

eradication of the imperial system. The pro-Japanese judged that it would be preferable to occupy Japan while collaborating with and making use of the moderates who remained in the country, and that an occupation would be more in line with American national interests.¹⁸

Furthermore, these people were heavily involved in drafting the Potsdam 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 words “revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies” reflected the perception of the pro-Japanese officials.

Diplomatic historian Makoto Iokibe has called the extensive efforts made by these pro-Japanese officials “good fortune in the midst of defeat” bestowed on Japan unexpectedly.¹⁹ 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.”²⁰

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, Konoe, in his famous statement to the emperor in February 1945, wrote: “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 army chief of general staff’s view that the United States would demand the elimination of the imperial family, Konoe responded that the Americans’ goal was to overthrow the

¹⁸ Iriye, *Nichibei Senso*, 261–63.

¹⁹ Iokibe, *Nichibei Senso to Sengo Nihon*, 189.

²⁰ Kecskemeti, *Strategic Surrender*, 210.

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 this view.²¹

This sort of Japanese intelligence significantly influenced Japan’s acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration. In response to the declaration, issued on July 26, 1945, and followed by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet Union’s entry into the Pacific War, the Suzuki cabinet issued an emergency telegram on August 10. It stated 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 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 this reply on August 10, and opinion within the government was divided over how to interpret it and how to respond: accept the terms, ask for further clarification, or continue with the war.

A recent study has revealed that at this critical time, intelligence from neutral countries, including Sweden and especially Switzerland, played an important role in communications between senior Japanese and U.S. officials regarding “preservation of the national polity.”²²

For example, the study notes that the report titled “*Potsudamu*” *Sangoku Sengen ni kansuru Kansatsu* [Observations concerning the trilateral “Potsdam” Declaration], prepared based on European intelligence and submitted to Foreign

²¹ Junichiro Shoji, “Konoye Josobun’ no Saikento: Kokusai Josei Bunseki no Kanten kara” [Konoe Fumimaro and Konoe’s memorial to the throne in February 1945], *Kokusai Seiji* [International Relations] 109 (May 1995): 62–64.

²² Tetsuo Arima, “*Suisu Chohomo*” *no Nichibei Shusen Kosaku: Potsudamu Sengenwa Naze Ukeireraretanoka* [Japan-U.S. end of war efforts relating to the “Swiss espionage network”: Why was the Potsdam Declaration accepted?] (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2015).

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 into consideration maintaining Japan’s honor and adopted a stance considerably different from that taken toward Germany.

Furthermore, the study refers to a telegram from the minister to Sweden, Suemasa Okamoto, which 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 continuation of the imperial 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 also communicated to the emperor and Prime Minister Suzuki and affected subsequent developments.²³

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.²⁴ At a time when opinion was divided over the response to Byrnes’s 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, in his second decision issued to the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War, commented that “while it is natural that we have some concerns about our counterpart’s

²³ *Ibid.*, 251–54, 273–76.

²⁴ 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), 212.

attitude, I do not want to doubt it.”²⁵

Before and after making this comment, the emperor attempted to assuage the strong concerns expressed by Army Minister Anami about the American reply, saying: “Do not worry, Anami, I have conclusive proof” (August 12),²⁶ and “Anami, I fully understand your feelings, but I am confident that I can preserve the national polity” (August 14).²⁷ These remarks suggest that the emperor had obtained some evidence through intelligence and other sources.

Moreover, it cannot be ignored that the emperor and Suzuki had a certain amount of trust in the United States, and therefore, interpreted the information they had acquired positively. At the cabinet meeting on August 13, Suzuki stated in regard to Byrnes’s reply: “From rereading 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.”²⁸ 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.”²⁹

In his second decision issued 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.”³⁰ 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.”³¹

²⁵ Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi*, 140.

²⁶ 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), 757.

²⁷ Hisanori Fujita, *Jijūcho no Kaiso* [The grand chamberlain’s memoir] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1961), 141.

²⁸ Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi*, 128.

²⁹ Hatano, *Saisho Suzuki Kantaro no Ketsudan*, 202.

³⁰ Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi*, 140.

³¹ Hatano, *Saisho Suzuki Kantaro no Ketsudan*, 224.

A well-known example of Japan's trust in the United States is the country'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."³² In contrast, Suzuki did not send a congratulatory telegram five days later on the fifty-sixth birthday of Hitler, the leader of Germany, Japan's ally.

The Nazi leadership, on the other hand, was delighted to hear the news of Roosevelt's death, believing that it would bring about a turning point in the war. Hitler is said to have issued a statement asserting that "fate has taken from us Roosevelt, the greatest war criminal in history." Thomas Mann, a German writer 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."³³

Military Factor: The Gap between Japanese and U.S. Perceptions of the Decisive Battle for the Home Islands

Third, I consider the contrasting Japanese and American perceptions of the military significance of the "decisive battle for the Japanese Home Islands," codenamed Operation *Ketsu* by the Japanese and Operation Downfall by the Americans. From around spring of 1945, about the time Germany was defeated, the emperor began to show great interest in a battle for the Home Islands.³⁴ For

³² Sukehiro Hirakawa, *Heiwa no Umi to Tatakai no Umi* [Sea of peace and sea of war] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 1993), 81.

³³ *Ibid.*, 149–50.

³⁴ For a study that analyzes the relationship between the emperor and the end of war in 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"], in *Kokusai Kankyo no Henyo to Seigun Kankei* [Transformation of the international situation and civil-military relations], ed., Shinichi Kitaoka (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2013).

example, the *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku* records that on May 9, after listening for more than an hour to a report from the army’s chief of general staff, Yoshijiro Umezu, 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.”³⁵

Although the emperor inquired about the actual state of preparations for defending the Home Islands, he failed to receive a clear-cut explanation from the army. He thus actively attempted to grasp the situation by a number of means, including by sending his aides-de-camp to inspect Togane and Katakai, the beaches in the vicinity of Kujukurihama, on June 3 and 4.³⁶

On June 9, Umezu returned from an inspection of Manchuria and gave a pessimistic report to the emperor: Japan’s troop strength in Manchuria was only equivalent to eight U.S. divisions, and Japan had only enough ammunition for a single battle. On hearing this report, the emperor began to believe that “as the forces in the homeland are far less well equipped than the forces in Manchuria and China, there is no way they could fight.” The report therefore became one of the factors heightening the emperor’s anxieties regarding the end of the war.³⁷

Admiral Kiyoshi Hasegawa, who had been sent to strategic areas in Japan as a special inspector general of fighting power assets, briefed the emperor on June 12. Hasegawa reported that because of a lack of weapons, shortage of equipment, and inadequate training, the forces at the anticipated fronts could not possibly fight a battle for the Home Islands. As an example, Hasegawa explained that the small boats that were to be utilized as suicide attack weapons were hastily built, installed with used car engines, and operated by inadequately trained personnel.

³⁵ The Imperial Household Agency, *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku* (9), 663.

³⁶ War History Office, National Defense College, Defense Agency, *Senshi Sosho Daihonei Rikugunbu <10>* [Military history series: Army Department, Imperial Headquarters <10>] (Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 1975), 449.

³⁷ Takashi Ito, ed., *Sokichi Takagi Nikki to Joho (Ge)* [Sokichi Takagi: Diary and information (Vol. II)] (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 2000), 885–86.

The emperor was astonished and commented, “I can fully imagine.”³⁸

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 iron salvaged from bombs dropped by the enemy. Based on this information, the emperor “confirmed that war was impossible.”³⁹

On June 13, the emperor was notified of the “honorable death” of the navy’s garrison in Okinawa, and on June 14 and 15, he fell ill and did not make any public appearances.

According to the *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku*, on June 20, the emperor told Foreign Minister Togo “that he desired an early termination of the war.”⁴⁰ On this occasion, the emperor stated that “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 in the Japanese homeland is inadequate for a war,” adding, “Please proceed to terminate the war as quickly as possible.”⁴¹

The series of reports on a battle for the Home Islands had a significant influence on the emperor’s perception. Many historians note that these reports led him to abandon the idea of making peace after dealing the enemy a severe blow and to shift instead to pursuing a swift peace.⁴²

³⁸ Statement by Kiyoshi Hasegawain 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), 569–70.

³⁹ 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] (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1991), 118.

⁴⁰ The Imperial Household Agency, *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku (9)*, 705.

⁴¹ Shigenori Togo, *Jidai no Ichimen* [An aspect of time], ed. Togo Shigenori Kinenkai (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1985), 340.

⁴² For example, Kazutoshi Hando, *Showashi 1926–1945* [Showa history 1926–1945] (Tokyo: Heibonsha Library, 2009), 461; Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Anto Sutarin, Toruman to Nihon Kofuku* [Secret feud: Stalin, Truman, and Japan’s surrender] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2006), 167.

Meanwhile, the army continued to call for the “honorable death of 100 million” and with continued confidence, insisted on a “battle for the Japanese Home Islands.” 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 Pacific War, Togo asked, “Are you confident that you can prevent the enemy from landing in the Japanese homeland?” 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.”⁴³ The army, while recognizing that ultimate victory was impossible, continued to hang on to a thread of hope.

Nevertheless, in his first decision issued 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?”⁴⁴ The emperor thus mentioned the incomplete preparations for the battle for the Home Islands, and not the atomic bombings or the Soviet Union’s entry into the Pacific War, as reasons for accepting the Potsdam Declaration. He 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?”⁴⁵

This comment caused Army Major General Tatsuhiko Takashima, chief of staff of the Twelfth Area Army and the Eastern Command Headquarters, who

⁴³ Togo, *Jidai no Ichimen*, 357.

⁴⁴ Koichi Kido (Kido Koichi Nikki Kenkyukai Kotei), *Kido Koichi Nikki (Gekan)* [Diary of Koichi Kido (Vol. II)] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1966), 1223–24.

⁴⁵ 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 the war cabinet’s “confidant”] (Tokyo: Kawade Bunko, 2015), 207–8.

was entrusted with defense of the Kanto area, to feel responsible for the reference to the Twelfth Area Army's "biggest shortcoming," in other words, the lack of defensive preparations at Kujukurihama. He responded, "The Battle for the Home Islands is just a 'house of cards,' as is symbolized by the defensive positions at Kujukurihama."⁴⁶ Conversely, the army general staff frequently inspected the defenses in various areas in preparation for the battle for the Home Islands. According to its reports, not only were the fortifications, supplies, training, and logistics supplies inadequate, but even the spirit of decisive fighting was lacking. Thus, in reality, the general staff also recognized the difficult situation.⁴⁷

It is noteworthy that in this decision issued 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, and giving as an example preparations for defending the Home Islands. Additionally, the emperor noted that since the outbreak of the war, there had been significant discrepancies between the "plans and results" of both the army and the navy. 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."⁴⁸

These remarks sent shock waves through 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

⁴⁶ Yomiuri Shimbun, ed., *Showashi no Tenno (3): Hondo Kessen to Potsudamu Sengen* [The emperor in Showa history (3): The battle of the Japanese Home Islands and the Potsdam Declaration] (Tokyo: Chuo Bunko, 2012), 44–45.

⁴⁷ See, for example, War History Office, *Senshi Soshō Daihōnei Rikugunbu <10>*, 247–53, 310–16, 376–77.

⁴⁸ Sakomizu, *Dainihon Teikoku Saigo no Yonkagetsu*, 207–8.

no trust in the military . . . It was an expression of his increasing distrust in the military. This distrust was directly expressed by His Majesty the Emperor.⁴⁹

Shuichi Miyazaki, chief of the First Bureau, General Staff Office, wrote in his diary: “A day of great misfortune. What humiliation.”⁵⁰

In effect, the emperor’s distrust of the army, which he made explicit for the first time in connection with preparations to defend the Home Islands, was one of the reasons he 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 that Japan was defeated militarily, the army had asked for an opportunity to strike the enemy somehow. However, the emperor’s distrust severed all hope.

For the United States, on the other hand, despite Japan’s poor and incomplete 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 of the battles for Iwo Jima and Okinawa and the cost to the United States due to Japanese military resistance—the death or injury of an estimated 35 percent 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. William D. Leahy, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and others noted that nearly 35 percent died or were injured in the Battle for Okinawa, and forecasted that Operation Downfall would result in a similar death toll.

⁴⁹ Kawabe Torashiro Bunsho Kenkyukai, ed., *Shosho Hikkin: Rikugun wa Akumade Goseidan ni Shitagaitte Kodosu* [Follow the words of the emperor: The army will act in compliance with the imperial decision] (Tokyo: Kokushokankokai, 2005), 178–79.

⁵⁰ War History Office, *Senshi Soshō Daihonei Rikugunbu <10>*, 453.

Accordingly, they were reluctant to undertake the operation and advocated easing the terms of unconditional surrender to minimize casualties. Meanwhile, George C. Marshall, army chief of staff, was more optimistic. In the end, the meeting approved Operation Olympic (an invasion of Kyushu), one of the operations planned under Downfall, and decided to put on hold Operation Coronet (an invasion of the Kanto Plain), the other operation under Downfall 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. Referring to the fierce fighting on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, he 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 U.S. government departments each had their own widely varying projections of the number of deaths and injuries from Operation Downfall. A number of recent studies based on newly released historical records have higher casualty estimates.⁵³

In any case, U.S. concern about the military cost of an invasion of the Japanese Home Islands led the United States to reconsider its demand for Japan’s unconditional surrender, and ultimately, the war ended with Japan accepting the Potsdam Declaration.

Kecskemeti writes, “Our theoretical analysis implies that strong residual capabilities on the losing side are apt to produce a substantial ‘disarming’ effect

⁵¹ Makoto Iokibe, *Beikoku no Nihon Senryo Seisaku: Sengo Nihon no Sekkeizu (Ge)* [U.S. occupation policy toward Japan: The blueprint of post-war Japan (Vol. II)] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Sha, 1985), 180–87 and Hasegawa, *Anto*, 168–72.

⁵² Iokibe, *Beikoku no Nihon Senryo Seisaku (Ge)*, 192.

⁵³ Kort, “Hiroshima to Rekishika,” 483–87.

on the winning side by inclining the winner to make political concessions to the loser as incentives for surrender.” Kecskemeti notes that potential battles in Japan that would reflect Japan’s geographical advantages as an island country, the Japanese military’s residual capabilities, and Japan’s extreme will to resist were regarded as grave threats by the United States, which was unlike the situation in Germany and Italy in the final stage of the war. He believes that these things thus served as valuable assets for Japan to obtain political concessions from the United States in the transactions and negotiations on its surrender.⁵⁴

Military historian John Ferris notes that Japanese assets and combat that caused heavy casualties to U.S. forces in the Pacific theater: “did achieve some political objectives. [Japan’s] defeat achieved a victory of a kind.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

Had decisive fighting taken place on the Home Islands, there would have been even greater loss of life for Japan and the United States. Moreover, Japan’s urban areas and countryside would have been devastated, and Japan would likely have been put under direct foreign rule and conceivably been partitioned like Germany. Japan, however, was able to avoid this tragedy by terminating the war more quickly than Germany, that is, 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 Germany was “liberated” was introduced by German President Richard von Weizsäcker in his famous address to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the war’s end. The president identified May 8, 1945 as

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

⁵⁵ John Ferris, “Taiheiyo Senso Kokiniokeru Rengokoku no Senryaku” [Politics as strategy: The United States and the end of the Pacific War, 1944–1945], in *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)], eds., Masaki Miyake et al. (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2013), 253.

the day of “liberation” from Nazism, and this view has now become widespread.⁵⁶

For Japan, on the other hand, termination of the war literally signified the “end of war.” The war was terminated through military “defeat,” accompanied by difficulties and sacrifice, even though Japan had agreed to the disadvantageous unconditional surrender. The Potsdam Declaration stated 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 the war against Germany in the European theater, there was a complex interaction among the military objectives and interests of many countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, but Japan’s situation was more favorable than Germany’s. 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 discussed, the limiting of war objectives, the existence of a relationship of trust, and the considerations concerning a battle for the Home Islands were all matters that concerned only Japan and the United States. This prevented the political situation from being further complicated and made termination of the war relatively easy. Furthermore, there were pro-Japanese officials 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 the perspective of both “trust” and reasonableness.

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, 1994), 180–211.

⁵⁷ Sumio Hatano, “Shusen wo Meguru Shidoshazo: Suzuki Kantaro wo Chushin ni” [Images of leaders at the end of war, with a focus on Kantaro Suzuki], in *Kindai Nihon no Ridashippu: Kiro ni Tatsu Shidosha tachi* [Leadership in modern Japan: Leaders at the crossroads], ed., Ryoichi Tobe (Tokyo: Chikura Shobo, 2014), 194.