

[Chairman's Summary Statement]

Strategy in the Pacific War

Tadashi Kagatani

Aiming at bilateral and multilateral comparative studies, the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) has been holding the “International Forum on War History” every year since FY2002. This year, NIDS is holding the 8th International Forum on War History.

Since FY2007, this forum has been focusing on the Pacific War as the main theme. By discussing topics such as “New Perspectives on the War in the Pacific” in FY2007 and “The Japan Strategies of the Allies during the Road to Pearl Harbor” in FY2008, this forum discusses the Pacific War with focus on new perspectives or higher-level “grand strategies,” including military strategies, military administration, and/or POWs, rather than traditional perspectives, such as military operations or specific combat.

This year, the forum’s theme is “Strategy in the Pacific War.”

As you know, one of the achievements of NIDS Military History Department is the voluminous work “War History Series” consisting of 102 volumes. We are proud of the “War History Series” as Japan’s top-class historical material for researchers working on the Pacific War. On the other hand, it actually has some problems.

As one of these problems, some analysts criticize as follows: “War History Series” focuses too much on combat operations and provides insufficient description on “grand strategies”; in this sense, “War History Series” has separate descriptions for the army and the navy and does not have clear descriptions on “grand strategy” as a nation.

To address these criticisms, NIDS Military History Department would like to edit “(New) History of the Pacific War (tentative title)” in 4–5 years, which will focus on “grand strategy” based on new perspectives or new historical materials.

To this end, we are making efforts in our daily tasks so that researchers’ survey researches, NIDS seminar sessions, and the overseas historical materials research/collection program started in FY2007, which will serve for editorial works on “History of the Pacific War.”

NIDS holds this forum as a part of such efforts. I really hope that the 12 researchers, 5 foreign researchers and 7 researchers from Japan, including those belonging to NIDS Military History Department, make presentations or hold discussions from various perspectives to provide an overall picture of the Pacific War.

The outline of this forum is as follows.

First, special speaker Dr. Edward Luttwak makes his speech titled “Grand Strategy and the Byzantine ‘Operational Code.’” He defines grand strategy as “reasonable adjustment between national interests and the means to protect/enhance national interests” and explains that the means is knowledge and persuasion, in other words, interactions of intelligence/diplomacy and military power. In addition, every nation has its grand strategy, and the Byzantine Empire also had such a strategy. By extracting the operational codes of the Byzantine Empire, he concluded that these operational codes include (1) avoiding war by every possible means in all possible circumstances, but always acting as if it might start at any time; (2) gathering intelligence on the enemy and his mentality, and monitor his movements continuously; and (3) campaigning vigorously, both offensively and defensively, but attack mostly with small units; emphasizing patrolling, raiding, and skirmishing rather than all-out attacks. His speech makes us understand anew that grand strategies are very important for the existence of a nation.

Then, Dr. Ikuhiko Hata made the keynote speech, “Comparative Analysis of Japan and U.S. Global Strategy 1941–1943.” He compares and analyses important policy documents that Japan and the United States prepared for the coming war prior to the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States: “Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War against the U.S., Great Britain, Holland and Chiang” (November 15, 1941) (hereinafter, referred to as “Draft Proposal”) as decided at the Liaison Conference between the Government and the Imperial General Headquarters, and “Guidelines for Implementing National Policy” (November 1, 1941) on the Japanese side; and “Victory Program” (or, “Victory Plan”; September, 1941), and the Lend Lease Act (March, 1941), Rainbow No.5 (May, 1941), and Plan Dog (November, 1940) on the American side. The Draft Proposal assumed Great Britain as the main enemy in the meantime expecting Germany to beat Great Britain. In addition, it basically anticipates the protracted endurance, while the Japanese Army recognizes Asia as the main battlefield and the Navy regards the Pacific Ocean as the main battlefield. Despite the uncertainty of victory or defeat, Japan should come away with a draw at the end. On the other hand, “Victory Program” regards Germany as the main enemy, expecting the Soviet Union to beat Germany. It basically assumes a shift from protracted endurance to major offensive. Recognizing Europe as the main battlefield, it assumes that the war should be ended with a victory over Japan. Before starting our sessions, Dr. Hata’s speech briefly discusses the grand strategies of Japan and the U.S. for the Pacific War.

In the 1st session, we had presentations by three researchers and comments on their presentations with focus on “Outbreak of the Pacific War.” First, Dr. Kiyoshi Aizawa (Chief of the

Second Research Office, Military History Department, NIDS) made a presentation titled “Japanese Strategy in the First Phase of the Pacific War.”

According to him, “Draft Proposal” as mentioned by Dr. Hata is one and only war plan or grand strategy of Japan about the Pacific War, but it is very incomplete. To carry through such an incomplete plan, Japan conducted unrealistic operations (from the viewpoints of Japan’s national capability and battle capability). When starting a war, operation plans of the Army and the Navy, which were prepared in line with the operation plan as described in “In the Event that War was to Break with the U.S., Great Britain, and Holland during Operations in China” in the FY1941 Operation Plan, were made up for this incomplete war plan. Any war plan was not feasible for a war against the U.S. and Great Britain due to Japan’s weak national capability. To address this problem, Admiral Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet conducted the attack on Pearl Harbor. However, even Admiral Yamamoto could not work out a “plan for victory” for this war, as Dr. Aizawa concluded.

Then, Dr. Williamson Murray made his presentation, titled “Allied Strategy in the First Phase of the Pacific War: Pearl Harbor and the U.S. Reaction.” According to him, victory in this war comes from a gap in commanders’ abilities. He pays attention to the fact that the U.S. Navy’s senior leaders made most of combat operations to purge peacetime commanders for 11 months after the Attack on Pearl Harbor. As it turned out, it took the entire period of combat for the U.S. Navy to handle this process, but the U.S. Navy gained advantages over Japanese military that did not go through this process.

Dr. Brian Farrell made his presentation, titled “By the Seat of the Pants? Allied Strategy and Japanese Onslaught in Southeast Asia December 1941-May 1942.” According to him, the Allies faced necessity to pull such a grand strategy together to address the Japanese offensives from the Central Pacific to southern Burma. Then, paying attention to the organization and operations of ABDA Command, the “Malay Barrier” concept, and naval strategies, he pointed out that the Allies formed their earlier strategies shaped by narrow national goals, but they finally compromised the attempt to pull together a coalition grand strategy when facing increased pressure from Japanese military.

To the presentations by these three speakers, Dr. Haruo Tohmatsu commented that the biggest failure of the Allied forces was getting trapped by the Singapore Strategy. The Singapore Strategy means that Great Britain would defend its stronghold in Singapore by sending its troops in times of emergency. The Allied powers stuck to this strategy, and as a result, they failed to sufficiently concentrate their war potential. In addition, he also emphasized that each of the Allied powers pursued its individual national interests.

With focus on “Fighting in the Pacific,” the 2nd session had presentations by 2 researchers and comments on these presentations. First, Col. Noriaki Yashiro (Senior Fellow, Military History Department, NIDS) made his presentation, titled “Japanese Strategy in the Second Phase of the Pacific War.”

According to him, Japan drafted the first “The Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War” after completing southern operations, but it includes incoherent arguments of the Army and the Navy. When revisions of strategy due to the changes in the situations, Japan had problems in (1) making errors at the situation analysis stage (tactical situations analysis and information sharing between the Army and Navy, (2) failing to form a common concept in setting up strategies between the Army and Navy (the key forward areas and key rearward areas), and (3) failing to form integrated battle capabilities in attaining Japan’s strategies (integration of army and naval air units). Concretely speaking, in the wake of the U.S. airplanes’ raids on Japan’s homeland, Japan rushed into the Midway Operation led by the Navy. However, Japan’s strategy took a weaving course due to adverse change in battle situations, such as the defeat in the Midway Operation and the Allied powers’ counterattacks on Guadalcanal. In the 2nd “The Outline to be Followed in the Future for Guiding the War,” Japan intended to shift its strategy from offensive to defensive, but Col. Yashiro points out that the outline was unclear and did not set a priority between the Army’s argument calling for setting up strategic advantages at first and the Navy’s argument to beat up enemy’s counterattacks as needed. Then, he concludes that Japan’s strategy on the U.S. was inconsistent.

Next, Dr. Phillips O’Brien made his presentation, titled “American Strategy in the Pacific after Midway: From Parity to Supremacy.” According to him, for the American Navy the greatest dilemma was how to support a maritime advance without sea supremacy, and in the face of Japanese military with certain tactical advantages, such as superior nighttime capabilities. In the end American naval strategy, responding to the tactical experiences of the campaigns opted for the measured island-hopping campaign. According to Dr. O’Brien, this strategy was mostly successful, but land force casualties were significant as was air craft wastage.

To the presentations by these two speakers, Mr. Hiroyuki Shindo (Senior Fellow, Military History Department, NIDS) asked a question why Japanese military stayed on the offensive after completing the southern operations. Panelists commented that it is too simple to attribute it to the navy’s “victory disease” and that Japan had the operational requirement to make the U.S. always stand at a defensive stance and faced a dilemma that keeping an offensive stance would lead to the loss of Japan’s own battle capability as well.

The 3rd session focuses on “End of the Pacific War” and has presentations by two researchers and comments on these presentations. First, Mr. Junichiro Shoji (Deputy Director, Military History Department, NIDS) makes his presentation, titled “Japanese Strategy in the Final Phase of the Pacific War”

According to him, Japan had no choice but depending on diplomacy to end the war, rather than on victories by force, and the Soviet Union was a key in this context. Japan and the Soviet Union respectively belonged to the opposing camps of the Axis powers and the Allied powers, but these two nations formed very “ambiguous” relationship because they concluded the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact and had official diplomatic relations. And he said that diplomacy with the Soviet Union was very important for Japan’s strategy during the war. After Okinawa fell, Japan explored the possibility of a peace with Great Britain and the United States which would be mediated by the Soviet Union, regardless of the Soviet Union’s notification that it would not extend the neutrality pact. However, in August 1945, the Soviet Union opened hostilities against Japan, and this was a breaking point which brought Japan to end the war. Mr. Shoji points out that even after the Soviet Union commenced its military offensive against Japan, the Army’s guideline for conducting the stipulated that “we will take advantage of a favorable opportunity and, using the Soviet Union, make an effort to end the war.” and this shows that the plans involving the Soviet Union which were developed in relation to the termination of the war were indeed a “diplomacy of illusion” as mentioned by Professor Chihiro Hosoya.

Then, Dr. John Ferris made his presentation, titled “Politics as Strategy: The United States and the End of the Pacific War, 1944-45.” He emphasized that the United States felt certain about victory since 1944, but there emerged rivalries between the United States Army and Navy in terms of the postwar order. As a result, the Army and the Navy opposed each other in Washington, and they increasingly viewed operations and strategy in the Pacific Theater from the perspective of strengthening their postwar positions. According to Dr. Ferris, the combination of these operational, strategic and political processes worked in favor of General Douglas MacArthur, with great consequences for the nature of American victory and Japanese defeat in 1945, and afterward.

To the presentations by these two speakers, Dr. Kanji Akagi made a comment about peacemaking negotiations via the Soviet Union, saying that the Army denied peacemaking but peacemaking negotiations might have domestic political implications with aiming to end the war by making use of the Soviet Union. As for the Army’s contradictory attitudes toward the Soviet Union, Dr. Akagi points out three perspectives: The Army evaluated the Soviet Union highly because it had expectations from the Soviet Union as acting as an antenna in relations with the U.S. and Great Britain; the Army also negatively evaluated the Soviet Union because it would surely

lose in battles and had no choice but to compromise with the Soviet Union; and the Army staff had a sense of intimacy with the Soviet Union as military personnel.

To conclude the forum, we had “General discussion and Chairman’s summary.” First, commentators made some supplementary comments. When Dr. Tohmatsu asked a question why Great Britain could not give up the Singapore Strategy, Dr. Farrell answered that Great Britain believed its leadership in Asia. In addition, Dr. Tohmatsu made a comment that researchers engaging in research works on the Pacific War should take into consideration China’s military cooperation and military factors that posed local pressures on Japan. Then, Mr. Shindo, Senior Fellow of NIDS, asked Dr. Murray a question about the feasibility of a theory that Japanese military’s advancement into New Guinea, which Japan and the U.S. placed no importance on, resulted in the counteroffensive of the U.S. military. Dr. Murray answered that the U.S. advanced into New Guinea because the U.S. reacted to Japan’s construction of an air base, which would threaten maritime transport route to Australia and New Zealand.

Then, we had a Q&A session with the floor. When a forum attendant asked a question about Japan’s logistics strategies, Dr. Aizawa answered that Japan called for protracted endurance but did not pay attention to the replenishment of the losses of marine vessels that would bring back resources from the southern areas to Japan and to the defense of logistic routes, and in a similar manner, Japan did not have any logistic plan to support it.

Finally, presenters and commentators made the following comments. Dr. Akagi said that a way of thinking that recognizes atomic bombing based on the image of Cold War or hydrogen bomb was a problem from historical research perspectives. Dr. Ferris said that Japan made a strategic mistake because it evaluated that Germany and Japan were more powerful than the other nations. Mr. Shoji of NIDS pointed out that German-Soviet peacemaking was difficult due to racial problems and that the timing of the emperor’s decision to end the war must be evaluated, paying attention to the fact that Germany surrendered after the Fall of Berlin. Mr. Shindo, Senior Fellow of NIDS, discussed that Japan and the U.S. developed their strategies in a different manner, reflecting a gap between “the haves” and “the have-nots.” Dr. O'Brien, citing the grand strategy of the Byzantine Empire as argued by Dr. Luttwak, pointed out that Japan’s strategies were prepared in a short time and in a complicated manner. Col. Yashiro, Senior Fellow of NIDS, said it took a long time for the army to change its concept of not conducting operations in the Pacific Ocean. Dr. Tohmatsu pointed out that the U.S. changed its commanders in the middle phase of the war, while Japan seldom changed its commanders, and mentioned the necessity for Japan’s drastic personnel relocation. Dr. Farrell said Japanese military’s advancements into entire Asia have shaped Asia’s historical direction in the second half of the 20th Century. Dr. Murray emphasized that the divided

U.S. has turned into “the united United States” due to Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. Dr. Aizawa said that a self-defensive war requires drafting even in an impossible military operation, and that Japan pushed itself into such a situation. Dr. Luttwak pointed out that the U.S. did not want a war for two years as of 1941 to prepare for a war in Europe, but Japan got tripped up by the State Department’s hard-line stance and did not understand the real intention of the U.S. Dr. Hata said that, when he interviewed ex-soldiers and asked them about why Japan started the war, most of them answered “because Japan wanted oil,” but as for his question of why Japan lost the war, they provided diversified answers, such as U.S. military’s high-quality radar, Essex-class aircraft carriers, B-29s, submarines, proximity fuses, or malaria, so it is difficult to identify the true reason. At last, I said that the names of U.S. military personnel were frequently pointed out in this forum, but the names of Japanese military personnel were seldom cited. It might be attributable to the gaps in personal evaluation or organizational culture between Japan and the U.S., or it might reflect a gap between the winner and the loser. In this context, by taking a cue from this forum, I suggested that we might be able to explore for a new viewpoint on military leadership or personnel issues.

I strongly believe that the outcomes of this forum would represent an important first step to research on, or grasp the overall picture of, “Grand Strategy of the Pacific War,” which is a medium-term theme for Military History Department, NIDS.

At the same time, the forum has also identified our research subjects for the future.

Researchers engaging in historical research usually think “I would like to grasp historical facts stereoscopically as much as possible. Without it, we might provide way too superficial and shallow message for the future.”

Roles of historical research are to faithfully restore past facts and provide them to the people living today. Receiving such information, people are able to use it from their viewpoints as an indicator for their future.

On the other hand, restoring historical facts is a very difficult task. Historical materials provide us only fragmented and one-sided information, rather than showing the overall picture. Of course, even if we find and connect a lot of buried historical materials, they do not provide the overall picture. In addition, due to the problems of the readers of such historical materials (concretely speaking, experiences/abilities of researchers), some researchers might restore historical facts only partially, without restoring the overall picture.

Even so, we are making efforts day and night to restore historical facts as stereoscopically and as close to reality as possible.

Today, the presentations from various perspectives from foreign researchers, which are usually unavailable in our daily life, would contribute to restoring “the overall picture of the Pacific War” to some extent, I guess.

Military History Department of NIDS would like to make clear “historical facts” stereoscopically by finding new historical materials at home and abroad, exchanging opinions between researchers, and making efforts for objective analysis/research.