

Japan and the Tripartite Pact

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Introduction: Alliance Policy and Japan

In the years following the Meiji Restoration, during which Japan strove to become a modern nation, Japan concluded three major alliance treaties with various foreign countries. These were the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, concluded in 1902, the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, signed in 1940 before the outbreak of the Pacific War, and the Japan-U.S. Alliance, which was signed after World War Two and is still in effect today. Nations sign alliance treaties with other nations for national security purposes, or, more specifically, to secure, above all, its own safety, or to obtain a dominant position against enemy nations during a war. Generally speaking, an alliance can therefore naturally be considered a success for a signatory if its safety has been secured by the pact, or if the military situation in a war develops favorably for the signatory because of the alliance. Conversely, an alliance may be considered a failure for any member which loses its security because of the agreement.

Seen from such a perspective, the Japan-U.S. Alliance, which, as mentioned above, is currently effective, may be considered a successful alliance to date, not only because it has secured Japan's national security for approximately sixty years, a period which saw the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the collapse of the latter, and the decline of the Communist bloc, but also because Japan was able to enjoy a broader economic and social prosperity under it.

On the other hand, the Tripartite Pact, which was concluded before the outbreak of war as an alliance against Britain and the U.S., can be considered as a straightforward example of a failure. Because of this alliance, Japan aligned itself as an adversary against the Allies, i.e. Britain and the U.S., within the overall framework of the Second World War, which pitted the Allies against the Axis powers. Japan subsequently plunged into the Pacific War with this overall framework being unchanged, and suffered a miserable defeat in the war.

The other major alliance in Japan's history was the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. This alliance was tested by the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. Japan, however, was able to fully draw out the benefits of the alliance, and avoided losing militarily to Russia, the mighty power. Furthermore, Japan was able to force Russia to accept Japan's conditions for ending the war, and was able to secure its safety. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance can therefore be considered an example of a successful alliance.

Upon comparing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Japan-U.S. Alliance, both of which are examples of successful alliances, and the Tripartite Pact, which was as failure as an alliance, it is possible to empirically derive a rule of sorts, which is that Japan seems to be able to secure its safety more effectively through an alliance with the Anglo-Saxon nations or maritime powers, such as the U.S. and Great Britain¹. Conversely, Japan seems to lose its national security when it enters into an alliance which results in conflict with the Anglo-Saxon nations, such as its Tripartite alliance with Germany, which produced such a result. The veracity of this empirical rule seems to be proved, and is still being proved, by the sixty years of peace which Japan has enjoyed after World War Two by strictly following the Japan-U.S. Alliance.

Before World War Two, however, Japan could not maintain a policy of cooperation with the Anglo-Saxon nations, even though it had started the century by entering into an alliance with Great Britain. Not only that, but Japan subsequently entered into the Tripartite Pact and plunged into war against Britain and the U.S. Why did this happen? Of course, there were forces within Japan before the war which favored cooperation with the Anglo-Americans. The Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN), which is the subject of this paper, has been seen as an example of such a force, and this view of the IJN as a pro-Anglo-American force may currently be said to be established theory. This view is not without basis, as the IJN initially strongly opposed the signing of the Tripartite Pact, which "in the end" resulted in war with the Anglo-Americans.

It was not easy, however, to actually put into practice during the prewar era a policy of cooperation with the Anglo-Americans, however much such a policy may have been proclaimed. To begin with, the Anglo-Americans could not always be treated as one monolithic entity. Since Britain and the U.S. naturally had their own separate set of national interests, there were examples where a policy of cooperation with the British would not necessarily mean a policy of cooperation with the Americans. One such clear example was the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. The Anglo-Japanese alliance should have been continued, from the standpoint of those who viewed an alliance with the Anglo-Americans as a condition for Japan's development. The Anglo-Japanese alliance could not be renewed, however, because none other than the U.S. strongly opposed its further existence. The concept of cooperation with the Anglo-Americans turned out to be nothing more than an "ambiguous" concept, when faced with the concrete issue of whether to abolish or to maintain the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

For the purposes of this paper, the relation between the issues of cooperation with the Anglo-Americans and the signing of the Tripartite Pact needs to be explored. In order to

¹ For example, Hisahiko Okazaki, *Senryakutekishikou toha Nanika* (What is Strategic Thinking?) (Chuokoron-Shinsha, 1983) as a book which shows such a point of view.

consider this issue, the established interpretation of the "IJN as a Promoter of Cooperation with the Anglo-Americans" shall intentionally be set aside, and the IJN's decisions and responses during the process leading to the Tripartite Pact shall be re-examined. Attention will be paid in particular to what the IJN was thinking in regards to military affairs and strategies because, such national security and purely military considerations were naturally of great interest to the IJN, which was of course a military organization, even as it considered how Japan should respond to actual diplomatic issues.

1. Southern Expansion Theory of the Navy and England

From late 1921 through early 1922, the Washington Conference was held, with the purpose of constructing a new post-World War One international order in East Asia. On December 13, 1921, the first great result of this conference emerged in the form of the Four-Power Treaty, concluded among Japan, Britain, the U.S. and France. The alliance between Japan and Britain, which had lasted for about 20 years since its inception in 1902, was terminated as a result of this. No evidence has been found to indicate that either the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) or the IJN, which were responsible for Japan's defense, strongly resisted the loss of this ally. It can be said that this is proof that the military significance of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had diminished after it had fulfilled its most important purpose during the Russo-Japanese War. Certainly, Japan's entry into World War One was based on this alliance. As Japan proceeded from entry into the war to cooperating with the Allies, however, the differences between Japan and Britain became more evident rather than the cooperation which should have existed between two allied countries. After the First World War, and as a product of the Washington Conference, which delineated new relationships in East Asia between Japan and Britain, and among Japan, Britain and the U.S., it was therefore natural for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to be replaced with the Four-Power Treaty, which aimed for a looser cooperation and which included the United States, which was strongly opposed to the further existence of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

The significance of the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance may be viewed differently, however, when one considers that in September 1940, approximately two decades after it was ended, Japan entered into an alliance with Germany, which was already in a state of war with Britain, and that in December 1941, Japan itself plunged into war with Britain. In other words, Japan and Britain had transformed from allies to enemies in war in just twenty years. Of course, the termination of the alliance did not automatically lead to the perception of England as a

hostile nation. For example, the IJA recognized anew the value of England as an ally as it attempted to carry out Japan's policy towards China in the second half of the 1920s, and there were muted calls for a revival of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The termination of the alliance, however, had more serious implications for the IJN, which after all had considered the Royal Navy as its model or mentor. The IJN was an organization which, from the beginning, had proclaimed expansion into the southern seas (the so-called "Southward Expansion" Doctrine) as the basic strategic concept underpinning its organizational existence. Because a "Southward Expansion" meant an expansion into the South Pacific and Southeast Asia, it inherently included the possibility of a collision with England, which was a major colonial power in Southeast Asia and had major colonies there². The termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance meant that this very England was no longer an ally of Japan.

The Southward Expansion Doctrine began to be earnestly proposed within the IJN in the 1930s, after the conclusion of the London Treaty for the Limitation and Reduction of Naval Armaments. During that period, anger surfaced within the IJN over Japan's failure to attain a 70 percent ratio in naval armaments relative to the United States in the Washington (1922) and London (1930) treaties, even though such a ratio was deemed absolutely necessary from the standpoint of national defense, and, as a result, Japan left the naval armaments limitations regime it had built with the Anglo-Americans, and embarked on a new program to expand its naval armaments. The Southward Expansion Doctrine which was espoused at that time especially took on an expansionist tendency, in order to justify such a buildup of naval armaments, and also expressed more hostility towards Britain rather than the United States, which had previously been the IJN's greatest hypothetical enemy.

In March 1936, the Navy Ministry Research Committee³ was established to "perform research and studies concerning . . . various methods for strengthening the content of considerations of naval policies." The First Committee of that committee, which was set up in order to "study and formulate specific proposals for naval policies which will be necessary for Imperial national policy and the realization thereof," drafted the "Guidelines for National

² Refer to Kiyoshi Aizawa, "The Path Towards an *Anti-British* Strategy by the Japanese Navy between the Wars", (Yoichi Hiramata, Ian Gow, Sumio Hatano (eds.)) *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000; Vol. 3, The Military Dimension* (University of Tokyo Press, 2001), pp. 155-166) for the deterioration in the recognition of England by the Imperial Japanese Navy between the wars.

³ "Research Committee on Naval Policy and Systems" (1936, Official Document - Note B, Personnel Affairs Vol. 2, preserved in the NIDS Library. Refer to Japanese Defense Agency, History Office of the National Defense College, *Senshi Soshō, Daihon'ei Kaigunbu, Rengo Kantai* (War History Series, The Imperial Headquarters, Navy Combined Fleet) (Vol. 1, Asagumo Shinbunsha, 1975), pp. 288-305, for the inauguration and activities of the Naval Ministry Research Committee.

Policies⁴." In these guidelines, the IJN advocated a policy of "Hold in the North, and Advance Southwards," which stipulated that "the fundamental policy will be to tighten domestic politics at home, while externally expanding southwards and simultaneously securing the Empire's foothold on the continent." This was in opposition to the "Northward Expansion" strategy advocated at the time by the IJA, and in particular Kanji Ishihara, who was the Operations Section chief of the Army General Staff, and which placed greater importance to the area north of Japan, and placed the greatest priority on advancing preparations for a war with the Soviet Union. Regarding the policy "towards various countries in the South" which was the target of the southern expansion, the First Committee's guidelines proposed as follows. "Domestically, a unified method will be discussed and established, the necessary organizations will be prepared, and the content of Taiwan and the Mandates will be strengthened, while externally, a gradual expansion will be attempted for the time being through immigration and economic measures, while on the other hand, careful preparations will constantly be made to counter the pressure (interference) which is naturally to be expected from England, the United States and the Netherlands, among others, and it will be necessary to complete preparations for the use of actual force, just in case the one-in-ten thousand event occurs." In other words, the First Committee indicated that preparations for a military resolution against England, the United States and the Netherlands were to be completed, even while noting that such measures were a contingency for a worst-case scenario. In addition, by listing "England and the United States" in that order among the nations expected to interfere with Japan, the IJN indicated which nation it perceived as its greater threat.

The shift within the IJN to a perception of Britain as a potential enemy resulted in the inclusion of Great Britain as a hypothetical enemy in the National Defense Policy, when it underwent its third revision in 1936. The revision of the National Defense Policy was initiated by an appeal from the IJN, and Shigeru Fukutome, chief of the Operations Section (or First Section) of the Naval General Staff, who led the Navy's drive for the revision, stated that the National Defense Policy had to be revised at that point because, given the worsening of Japan's international relations after the Manchurian Incident and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, "it became impossible to leave out of considerations the potential ability of Britain and the Netherlands, which both had serious and interlaced interests in East Asia, to become enemies (of Japan), in addition to the United States, the Soviet Union and China, three countries which had traditionally been Japan's hypothetical enemies."⁵ Tasuku Nakazawa, a staff officer of the

⁴ *Modern History Materials 8, Second Sino-Japanese War I* (Misuzu Shobo, 1964) pp. 354-355.

⁵ Shigeru Fukutome, "Hogo ni Kishita Kokubo Hoshin (National Defense Policy which became Waste)" ("in *Chisei, Bekkan, Himerareta Showa Shi* (Intellectuals, Supplementary Volume, Secrets in Showa History)),

aforementioned First Section of the Naval General Staff, who led the Navy's efforts in the actual rewriting of the National Defense Policy, noted that "it is expected that the Netherlands will depend on England and harden its stance towards Japan, when Japan executes the Southward Expansion Policy and makes economic advances into Netherlands' territories"⁶, as a reason for adding England to Japan's list of hypothetical enemies. The inclusion of Britain and the Netherlands in Japan's list of hypothetical enemies clearly was the core of the inclusion into the National Defense Policy of a southward expansion into Southeast Asia. At the same time, the Navy actively turned the Southward Expansion concept into a concrete national policy in the August 1936 "National Policy Standards", which stated that "the fundamental National Policy is to secure the foothold for the Empire on the Asian continent, and to expand and develop in the southward seas, both by diplomatic and military means".

Paul Wennecker, who was a German Naval Attaché in Japan in those days, wrote of these changes in the Imperial Japanese Navy in the mid 1930s as follows (June 1936).

Surprisingly, in contrast to the period up to around six months ago or so, when the entire Imperial Japanese Navy considered the U.S. as its only hypothetical enemy, recently, the IJN's fundamental attitude has changed, all the way down to the front line units The U.S. is no longer regarded as absolutely the only enemy in the future. Now, the main enemy is England.

It is almost certain that the operations research (of the Imperial Japanese Navy) is based on the assumption, that the fleet would be attacked from Singapore, in the southwest⁷.

The meaning of the IJN's Southward Expansion Doctrine had suddenly changed in the mid 1930s to an anti-British strategic doctrine⁸.

It is said that this sort of Anglophobic sentiment within the Navy was strongest among those line officers who rose up through the ranks after World War One and were lieutenant commanders and commanders in the mid-1930s. The careers of these mid-level officers overlapped the

(Kawade Shobo, December, 1956), p. 176.

⁶ Nakazawa Tasuku Kanko Kai (ed), *Kaigun Chujo Nakazawa Tasuku: Sakusen Bucho, Jinji Kyokuchō no Kaisō* (Recollections of Vice-Admiral Nakazawa Tasuku, Chief of the Operations Division and Personnel Bureau) (Hara Shobo, 1979), p. 14.

⁷ John W. M. Chapman, ed. and trans. and *The Price of Admiralty: The War Diary of the German Naval Attaché in Japan, 1939-1941*, Vol. I, (Sussex: Saltire Press, 1982) p. xiii.

⁸ In the 1937 Naval Operations Plan which was proposed in August 1936 (drafter Tasuku Nakazawa, of the Naval General Staff Unit 1, approved on September 3), Hong Kong and Singapore were listed as active bases of England in the East which must be completely wiped out. Military History Department of the National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan Defense Agency (ed.), *Shiryō-shū - Kaigun Nendo Sakusen-keikaku* (Historical Data Collection - The Navy Annual Operations Plan) (Asagumo Shimbun-sha, 1986) p. 37.

decade or so which followed the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which saw the spread of dissatisfaction within the IJN towards the naval arms limitations agreements with the Americans and British. It must be noted, however, that there was also still an older generation of upper ranking naval officers who were inheritors of the pro-British tradition that the IJN had fostered since the Navy's creation in the Meiji Era, and some of those were key figures in the so-called "Treaty Faction" and supported the Navy's disarmament regime from the standpoint of cooperation with the Anglo-Americans.

While certain of the IJN's higher-level officers may have had a pro-British perspective, one must be careful when considering just how strongly they actually held such beliefs during this period. The example of Mitsumasa Yonai and his views on the British will be considered in the following, since he is generally considered to be one of the IJN's key leaders and also a pro-British IJN officer. Yonai graduated from the 29th Class of the Imperial Japanese Naval Academy in 1901, and his overseas experience consisted of postings in Russia and China. He is considered to be a typical proponent of cooperation with Britain and the U.S. because he is said to have opposed the signing by Japan of the Tripartite Pact from February 1937 to August 1939, when he was Navy Minister, in order to "avoid the worsening of relationships with Britain and the U.S." To reiterate, this period falls immediately after Japan withdrew from the two naval arms limitation treaties, and was the period during which the proposed upgrading of the Anti-Comintern Pact (into the Tripartite Pact) became the greatest issue in Japan's foreign policy debates. The decisions and actions of Yonai and other naval leaders while he was Navy Minister with respect to this issue will be discussed in detail in the next section. In the following, Yonai's perspective of the British before he became Navy Minister will be considered by examining a letter he wrote in June 1934 to Zenshiro Hoshina, his underclassman at the Naval Academy (Hoshina was in the 41st Graduating Class).

Yonai likened the relationship between Japan and England in the mid-1930s to the adversarial relationship between England and Germany before World War I, describing the characteristics of England as; "England is generally skillful and they cannot be easily dealt with by ordinary means, and when there is an advantage for England, they will take measures which are completely opposite to their norm. Moreover, I think they will take various actions in the future which can be regarded as an expression of such characteristics. We must be careful, so that we do not allow England to make us look foolish"⁹. Judging from its context, this letter was probably a reply to a letter from Hoshina which itself expressed anti-British sentiment. In a

⁹ Makiko Takada, *Yonai Mitsumasa no Tegami* (Letter of Mitsumasa Yonai) (Hara Shobo, 1993), pp. 63-64.

portion of another letter to Hoshina (exact date unknown, but written sometime in 1935), Yonai wrote as follows regarding the European situation, where tensions were growing between the British and Germans after the rise of Hitler. "I cannot forecast at this time the European political situation as it revolves around Germany. However, I think it will very favorable if Germany should drop another and yet another bomb on the sore spots of power and the weak spots of the alliance. The trouble will not be resolved for some time, even though they probably won't make the mistake of repeating the previous Great European War."¹⁰

What can be read from these two letters is distrust towards British diplomacy, and sympathy towards German actions, which were beginning to threaten England in Europe, rather than any pro-British feelings on the part of Yonai. Moreover, Yonai likened the confrontation between Britain and Germany before World War I to the mid-1930s confrontation between Japan and Britain in the Far East, and seemed to feel hostility towards Britain. Apparently, Yonai was not pro-British to his core, and seemed to have a certain distrust of England. Such feelings seem to share a common sentiment with the IJN's actions as it moved towards identifying England as a hypothetical enemy, the process of which was outlined above. When he was Navy Minister, however, Yonai, who had had such feelings towards Britain, steadfastly opposed the enhancement of relations with Germany, which was under consideration while he was minister. The question of why he took this apparently contradictory stance will be considered in the next section.

2. Issues of Enhancement of the Anti-Comintern Pact and Confrontation of the Army and Navy

The German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact was concluded in the fall (November 25) of 1936, the same year in which England was included as a hypothetical enemy in the third revised version of the National Defense Policy. One year later, or on November 6, 1937, Italy joined the pact, and Japan, Germany and Italy had joined hands. Even after the Anti-Comintern pact with Germany had been signed, Hiroshi Oshima, who was Japan's Army Attaché stationed in Berlin and who was one of the most vociferous proponents on the Japanese side of the signing of such a pact with the Germans, continued to strongly promote the idea of "strengthening even further our military ties with Germany, in order to prepare for the conflict with the Soviet Union," which continued to be the IJA's greatest hypothetical enemy¹¹. The movement to enhance the Anti-Comintern Pact, which started around the summer of 1938, was also instigated by Oshima,

¹⁰ Takada, *Yonai Mitsumasa no Tegami* (Letter of Mitsumasa Yonai), p. 67.

¹¹ Nobuo Tajima, "Issues of Japan-Germany Military Pact 1936-1937", (*Nenpo: Kindai Nihon Kenkyu* (Annual Report: Modern Japan Studies), Vol. 11, Yamakawa Shuppan Sha, 1989)), pp. 274 - 275.

among others, whose goal was to strengthen Japan's strategic circumstances with respect to the Soviet Union. The main objective of the IJA, which was to conclude an agreement between Japan and Germany, basically did not change for about one year, until the negotiations to strengthen the Anti-Comintern Pact were stalled by the conclusion of the Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939. Prince Kan'in, Chief of the General Staff, when reporting to the Emperor in May 1939 in regards to this issue, emphasized that the IJA wished to "attack and destroy piecemeal first of all the Soviet Union, in cooperation with Germany"¹². In other words, the Imperial Japanese Army at this time wanted to arrange a German-Japanese alliance for the purposes of "advancing north," or, more specifically, to fight a war against the Soviet Union.

After the conclusion of the Anti-Comintern Pact, the IJN, which traditionally adopted the Southward Expansion Doctrine as its basic strategy, took an almost completely opposite stance as that of the IJA¹³. Osami Nagano, who was Navy Minister when the Anti-Comintern Pact was concluded and was said to be friendly to Germany, also took the standpoint of "absolutely opposing a war by the IJA against the Soviet Union, in other words, the 'Northward Expansion' doctrine"¹⁴. Mitsumasa Yonai, the Commander in Chief of the Yokosuka Naval Station at this time, expressed angry disappointment upon hearing reports of the signing of the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact, asking "why doesn't Japan join hands with the Soviet Union instead?", which may have been a natural reaction on the part of Yonai, given his long years of duty in the Soviet Union and his many years of promoting friendly Russo-Japanese relations¹⁵. Under such circumstances, it was natural that the IJN opposed the efforts of the IJA to further strengthen the Anti-Comintern Pact from the summer of 1938 onwards and thereby intensify the antagonistic relationship with the Soviet Union. In part, this was because Yonai, who became Navy Minister in February 1937, and who, as mentioned above, favored good Russo-Japanese relations, most likely viewed questionably, from the beginning, any strengthening of the Anti-Comintern Pact which would only reinforce Japan's hostility towards the Soviet Union. Furthermore, opposing a strengthening of such German-Japanese relations was a logical argument from the viewpoint of

¹² Minoru Nomura, *Taiheiyo Senso to Nihon Gunbu* (The Pacific War and the Japanese Military) (Yamakawa Shuppan Sha, 1983), pp. 187-188.

¹³ History Office, *Senshi Soshō, Daihon'ei Kaigunbu, Rengo Kantai* (War History Series, The Imperial Headquarters, Navy Combined Fleet) Vol. 1, p. 337. John W. M. Chapman, "The Pacific in the Perceptions and Policies of the German Navy, 1919-1945", *War and Diplomacy Across the Pacific, 1919-1952* (Watelloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988), p. 101.

¹⁴ Tetsuya Sakai, "Nihon Gaiko ni okeru Sorenkan no Hensen" (Changes of Soviet Union view in Japanese Diplomacy) (1923-37)" (*Journal of the Association of Political and Social Science* Vol. 97 No. 3 & 4), p. 131.

¹⁵ Takeo Shinmiyo (ed.), *Naval War Records Review Committee Documents* (Mainichi Newspapers, 1976) pp. 64-65. Nomura, *Taiheiyo Senso to Nihon Gunbu* (The Pacific War and the Japanese Military), p. 195.

the traditional "Southward Expansion" doctrine of the Navy. Yonai and other leaders of the IJN thus had every organizational reason to strongly oppose a strengthening of German-Japanese ties, no matter how strongly such a change should be advocated by pro-German mid-level IJN officers¹⁶.

The argument to date regarding the debate within Japan that took place in connection with the issue of strengthening the Anti-Comintern Pact has generally posited that the IJA and IJN were in disagreement over whether Britain would be an object of a strengthened Anti-Comintern Pact or not. In other words, this interpretation holds that the IJA tried to include England as an object of the German-Japanese alliance in order to accommodate the wishes of the Germans, who were eager to see the conclusion of such a strengthened alliance, whereas the IJN's leadership, lead by "Yonai, who was concerned about the worsening of Anglo-Japanese relations, and Vice-Minister Yamamoto, who was concerned about the worsening of Japanese-American relations," opposed the strengthening of the Anti-Comintern Pact into a full-fledged German-Japanese Alliance because they adhered to the IJN's "traditional" position of cooperating with the British and Americans¹⁷. This is directly indicated by a comment made by Yonai to Seishiro Itagaki, the Army Minister, after the negotiations regarding the strengthening of the Anti-Comintern Pact broke down due to the fact of the signing of the Russo-German Non-Agression Pact. In his remarks, which Yonai wrote in his notebook, he said,

I disagree with the further enhancement of the Anti-Comintern Pact (between Japan, Germany and Italy); if, however, there are circumstances where we have to somehow clean up the results of the seeds sowed by the Army, we should limit ourselves to dealing with the Soviet Union as we have done to date. If you are considering the inclusion of England, I will obstruct it, even at the risk of losing my job¹⁸.

Judging from the period in which Yonai wrote this in his notebook, and from the date that

¹⁶ However, the inclination of the Imperial Japanese Navy towards Germany between the wars, showed remarkable progress except for the issue of the enhancement of the Antikomintern Pact. Kiyoshi Aizawa, *Kaigun no Sentaku* (Japanese Navy's Road to Pearl Harbor) (Chuko Soshō, 2002), pp. 46-83, Berthold J. Sander-Nagashima, "Reluctant Allies: German-Japanese Naval Relations in World War II", Akira Kudo, Nobuo Tajima (eds.), *Nichi-Doku Kankeisi 1890-1945* (History of Japanese-German Relations, 1890-1945, Vol-II - Multiple Dynamics of the Axis Formation) (University of Tokyo Press, 2008), pp. 229-268.

¹⁷ Nomura, *Taiheiyo Senso to Nihon Gunbu* (The Pacific War and the Japanese Military), p. 194. Sadao Asada, "Nihonkaigun to Taibei Seisaku oyobi Senryaku" (Imperial Japanese Navy and Policies and Strategies towards the U.S.) (*History of Japan-U.S. Relations* Vol. 2, University of Tokyo Press, 1971), pp. 118-119.

¹⁸ Yuzuru Sanematsu (ed.), *Kaiguntaisho Yonai Mitsumasa Oboegaki* (Memorandum of Navy Admiral Mitsumasa Yonai) (Kojinsha, 1988), p. 40.

Yonai himself noted (August 1939) as the date when this meeting took place, this statement is regarded as Yonai's final opinion concerning the enhancement of the Anti-Comintern Pact. This excerpt undoubtedly indicates Yonai's stance of "compromising if necessary with an anti-Soviet alliance, but opposing an anti-British alliance." Whether such a stance of favoring cooperation with the British was actually Yonai's constant and unchanging attitude since the summer of 1938, when the proposed enhancement of the Anti-Comintern Pact became an issue, needs to be considered carefully. This is because Yonai and other members of the IJN's leadership took certain actions between the summer of 1938 through early 1939, which was roughly the first half of the period in which negotiations regarding the strengthening of the Anti-Comintern Pact took place, which could hardly be called consistent with a pro-British stance.

One such example is the IJN's involvement in the bilateral negotiations between Japan and Italy, which were held in order to reach an agreement aimed at England. These negotiations took place from around the summer of 1938 to early 1939, and were eventually merged with the discussions regarding the strengthening of the Anti-Comintern Pact. According to a report by the Italian Naval Attaché in Japan, the Japanese Navy "guaranteed action against the British if either Japan or Italy began a direct conflict with England, regardless of under what circumstances such a conflict took place," while on the other hand, it (the IJN) displayed no interest in an agreement between Germany, Japan and Italy aimed at the Soviet Union or international communism¹⁹. Yonai himself had great expectations for an anti-British alliance between Japan and Italy, and as late as March 1939, commented that "it will be a huge loss for Japan" if Italy did not join in such an agreement²⁰. In other words, Yonai did not strongly oppose the enhancement of the Anti-Comintern Pact "consistently from the beginning to the end", from a position of favoring cooperation with England²¹. Furthermore, it is hard to believe that concerns over possible negative effects on relations with the Americans, a stance which is most often attributed to Yamamoto, was a major point of contention within the IJN, because both proponents and opponents within the IJN of such changes to the Anti-Comintern Pact agreed, throughout the period that revisions to the Pact were an issue, on the need to avoid conflict with the United States²².

¹⁹ Valdo Ferretti, "Kaigun wo Tsujite Mita Nichi I Kankei; 1935-1940" (Japan-Italy Relations via the Navy; 1935-1940) (*History of Japan*, Vol. 472, September 1987) p. 83.

²⁰ *Modern History Materials 10, Second Sino-Japanese War 3* (Misuzu Shobo, 1963) pp. 186 & 227.

²¹ The execution of the Hainan Island Operation in February 1939 can be mentioned as an action which shows the confrontation attitude of Yonai and the higher level Naval officers towards England. Aizawa, *Kaigun no Sentaku* (The Navy's Choice), pp. 117-184.

²² Yoko Kato, *Churitsu* (Neutrality, Offense and Defense Involving the U.S. - Anti-Comintern Pact Enhancement Negotiations and International Environment)", (*Annual Report: Modern Japan Studies 11*;

Rather, it is more natural to explain the opposition of Yonai and the IJN's leadership to the strengthening of the Anti-Comintern Pact in terms of the aforementioned "Southward Expansion Doctrine," which was the Navy's traditional doctrine. Yonai had opposed the Anti-Comintern Pact itself because he was a proponent of friendly Russo-Japanese relations, while Yamamoto was extremely critical of the Army, which in his view was freely expanding the war in China²³. These two formed the perfect team as they set out to oppose the IJA's efforts to realize a German-Japanese alliance which tied in with the IJA's "Northward Expansion" doctrine. A "Hold in the North, i.e. Avoidance of Conflict with the U.S.S.R." doctrine, which was both a natural condition and conclusion of the IJN's "Southward Expansion" doctrine, was consistently the underlying reason why the IJN itself opposed efforts to strengthen the Anti-Comintern Pact. The essence of the efforts to strengthen the Anti-Comintern Pact at this time, however, was consistently to strengthen the German-Japanese agreement as an alliance aimed first of all at the Soviet Union, as its name of "Anti-Comintern" indicates. Faced with such efforts, the IJN was absolutely opposed to a "national tragedy"²⁴, which would lead to a war with the Soviet Union.

The efforts to conclude an alliance aimed at the Soviet Union lost their purpose when the Germans and Soviets signed the Russo-German Non-Agression Pact on August 23, 1939, and the negotiations for a strengthening of the Anti-Comintern Pact were ultimately halted. However, the IJN accepted rather easily this rapprochement between Germany and the Soviet Union, and certain elements within the IJN began exploring the possibility of strengthening anew German-Japanese and German-Italian-Japanese relations. This is in stark contrast to the IJA, which was squarely in the middle of a direct and intense military confrontation with the Soviet Union at Nomonhan, and which therefore was extremely shocked by the signing of the Russo-German agreement.

The IJN's thoughts in reaction to the signing of the Russo-German Non-Agression Pact were expressed in a paper written the next day (August 24) by Sokichi Takagi, Chief of the Research Section of the Navy Ministry, which was titled "Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Foreign Policies"²⁵. In this document, Takagi considered policies which Japan should take to respond to the new global situation created by the Russo-German Non-Agression Pact, and compared the following three options. First, an isolated and unilateral policy; second, an alliance

Limitations of Cooperation Policy), (Yamakawa-Shuppan-Sha, 1989).

²³ Kumao Harada, *Saionjiko to Seikyoku* (Prince Saionji and the Political Situation) (Vol. 7, Iwanami Shoten, 1952), pp. 38-39.

²⁴ Chapman, *The Price of Admiralty*, pp. 18-19.

²⁵ History Office, *Senshi Soshō, Daihon'ei Kaigunbu, Rengo Kantai* (War History Series, The Imperial Headquarters, Navy Combined Fleet) Vol. 1, p. 453.

with England and France (and also the United States); and third, an alliance with Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union. He concluded that the third policy, or an alliance among Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union, would be the most advantageous for Japan, the reason being that such a four-way alliance would enable Japan to avoid a "Northward Expansion," which would involve a war by the IJA fought against the Soviet Union, and would be best for centralizing national policy under the "Southward Expansion Doctrine." On the other hand, the policy towards England in this document was negative; for example, "the British Empire's interests which would be guaranteed by the Imperial Japanese Navy would be huge, and would include India, French Indochina, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands East Indies and rights and interests in China, while the compensation Britain can provide to Japan in return is miniscule and would be no more than just the mediation of the China Incident and economic support". Moreover, subsequent to this, Vice Admiral Naokuni Nomura, who was the central figure of the pro-Germany group within the IJN, and a number of others in the IJN actually presented to Germany, via the German Naval attaché stationed in Tokyo, a draft proposal of a cooperative arrangement among Japan, Germany and Soviet Union which targeted England²⁶. This concept of a four-way coalition treaty which included the Soviet Union and which was based on the Southward Expansion Doctrine of the IJN eventually would bear fruit a year later in the form of the Tripartite Pact, which was successfully concluded in September 1940.

Conclusion: From the Conclusion of the Tripartite Pact to a Four-Way Coalition Treaty

The concept of a Russo-German-Italo-Japanese Alliance existed in Japan, even before the Russo-German Non-Aggression Pact was concluded. The document, "Methods to End the China Incident both Immediately and Favorably," which was dated July 19, 1939 included this concept, and the authorship is attributed to Yosuke Matsuoka, who was the Foreign Minister when the Tripartite Pact was concluded²⁷. The paper noted that "in order to resolve the stagnant Sino-Japanese War which has become a concern for Japan, it is unquestionably more advantageous to include the Soviet Union on the side of Japan, Germany and Italy, in other words, to form a coalition among Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union, rather than compromising with England, as far as the British and Soviets, both of whom are supporting Chiang Kai-shek, are concerned"²⁸. Even as these ideas were being debated in Japan, the European situation changed

²⁶ Chapman, *The Price of Admiralty*, pp.18-19.

²⁷ Nomura, *Taiheiyo Senso to Nihon Gunbu* (The Pacific War and the Japanese Military), pp. 201-218.

²⁸ Regarding this document, there is a case where Toshio Shiratori who was one of the reformist bureaucrats

rapidly, with the Russo-German Non-Agression Pact being signed on August 23, 1939, and the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. In other words, Germany and England plunged into a state of war with each other.

The Tripartite Pact was concluded on September 27, 1940, about a year after the outbreak of war in Europe. The alliance between Japan and Germany was established while the Battle of Britain was being fought, in which England fought a desperate battle for survival in the skies over the British Isles against the Germans. The characteristics of this September 1940 alliance were completely different from the proposed Japan-Germany Alliance which was discussed during the earlier negotiations to strengthen the Anti-Comintern Pact. In contrast to the purpose of the Japan-Germany alliance which was proposed earlier, which was to enhance the strategy aimed at the Soviet Union in preparation for a northward expansion, the purpose of the 1940 proposal was to enhance the strategy aimed not only at England but also the U.S., by envisioning the inclusion of the Soviet Union into a four way agreement among Japan, Germany, Italy and the U.S.S.R. In other words, this 1940 Tripartite Pact was an alliance which conformed to the IJN's traditional southward expansionist strategy. This was the actual draft of the Tripartite Pact which the higher level officers of the Navy Ministry under Naval Minister Oikawa, who succeeded Yonai as Navy Minister, faced directly. Even though it was still an alliance with Germany, the characteristics of this draft of the 1940 Tripartite Pact was totally different from the draft of the earlier pact which the higher level officers around Yonai opposed in 1938 and 1939. Therefore, it was natural for Oikawa and the higher level officers to suddenly change the opposition of the IJN towards the Japan-Germany Alliance, which had continued until the previous year, because what had changed was the object of the Tripartite Pact itself, not the IJN's attitude.

It seems that this fact was seldom pointed out until now, when the issue of the Tripartite Pact and the IJN was analyzed. It is important to note, however, that Oikawa and the IJN's leadership scrupulously confirmed that the 1940 Tripartite Pact proposal conformed with the IJN's traditional southward orientation. For example, they made the IJN's agreement to the 1940 proposal conditional on mediation by Germany to improve Russo-Japanese relations. The IJN's approval of the 1940 Tripartite Pact proposal was thus given only after such conformity with a southward orientation of strategy had been checked and confirmed²⁹.

On the other hand, in the summer of 1940, the IJA lowered the priority of their own basic

of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, was mentioned as the writer. However, refer to Ryoichi Tobe, *Gaimusho Kakushinha-Sekai Shinchitsujo no Genei* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan Reformist - Vision of New World Order) (Chuokoron Shinsha, 2010), pp. 121-180, for the correspondence of the reformists of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

²⁹ Refer to Aizawa, *Kaigun no Sentaku* (The Navy's Choice), pp. 185-216.

strategy, the so called "Northward Expansion" doctrine, which gave preference to a war against the Soviet Union, and changed to a position of enhancing their strategy towards the south, i.e. against British and French possessions in Southeast Asia, which was deemed necessary to shut down external supply routes to Chiang Kai-shek and thus resolve the Sino-Japanese War³⁰. The creation of a "power vacuum" in the Southeast Asian area, or, in other words, the fact that the German victories in western Europe in the spring and summer of 1940 left the resource-rich French and Dutch possessions in Southeast Asia seemingly undefended and ripe for plucking, and a more cautious stance within the IJA towards the U.S.S.R. following the IJA's difficulties against the Soviet Red Army at Nomonhan in the summer of 1939, also affected the IJA's southward shift in strategic orientation. Under such circumstances, the Tripartite Pact was finally concluded in a short period of time, after full scale negotiations between Japan and Germany started in September 1940.

However, even Foreign Minister Matsuoka, who was pivotal in Japan during the promotion of the 1940 Tripartite Pact, failed to expand the Tripartite Pact into a four-way coalition, which was one of his dearest concepts. The greatest cause for the failure to expand the alliance further was the outbreak of the Russo-German War on June 22, 1941³¹. Matsuoka had visited Europe from March to April of this year, and tried hard to conclude a four-way coalition treaty. He was, however, unable to get the agreement of Germany, which had already decided upon war with the Soviet Union. Still, Matsuoka did successfully conclude the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact on his way home to Tokyo. Seen from Japan's perspective, this meant that a Russo-German-Italo-Japanese coalition of sorts had been completed, however incomplete it may have been.

The Pacific War, which broke out on December 8, 1941, was without doubt a war of "Southern Expansion," which saw Japan expand to the south, deep into Southeast Asia. If war with the Soviet Union had also broken out at the same time and Japan had found itself in a two-front war, in the north as well as the south, this would certainly have been a "national tragedy" for Japan, as the IJN had thought earlier. At this time, however, the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact functioned effectively, and war did not break out in the north. Evaluations of the Tripartite Pact, on the other hand, as an alliance which did not have any practical effectiveness in the context of a war between the Germans, Japanese and Italians on one side and the Anglo-Americans on the

³⁰ Sumio Hatano, "*Nanshin eno Senkai* (Turn to Southern Expansion: 1940; *Jikyokushoriyoko* (Guidelines for Dealing with Situations and the Army)), (Asian Economy XXVI-5, May 1985) pp. 25-48.

³¹ Refer to Masaki Miyake, *Stalin, Hitler to Nisso Doku I Rengokoso* (Stalin, Hitler and the Concept of an Alliance with Japan, Soviet Union, Germany and Italy), (Asahi Sensho, 2007), for the feasibility of Germany and the Soviet Union, regarding the Coalition Treaty between Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union.

other, are correct, especially when seen from a modern-day perspective. It is interesting to note, however, that what to Japan was a de facto four-way coalition, i.e. the Tripartite Pact and the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact taken as a whole, did save Japan from having to fight a two-front war simultaneously in the north and south, through the Italian surrender in September 1943, the German surrender in May 1945, and up through August 8, 1945, just one week before Japan finally had to surrender to the Allies.