

Tripartite Pact between Japan, Germany and Italy

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Introduction

Articles 1 and 2 of Tripartite Pact, concluded between Japan, Germany and Italy on September 27, 1940, mutually affirm that Japan recognizes and respects the “leadership” of Germany and Italy in the “establishment of a new order” in Europe, and that Germany and Italy recognize and respect the “leadership” of Japan in the “establishment of a new order” in “Greater East Asia.”

Article 3 goes further in that it stipulates that the three parties would undertake to assist one another in the event that one of them were to be attacked by a power “...at present not involved in the European War or in the Sino-Japanese Conflict.” At first glance this may appear to be aimed at both the United States and the Soviet Union. However, in Article 5 it is confirmed that the pact would in no way affect the political status then existing between the three parties and the Soviet Union, including the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. It can therefore be understood that the Tripartite Pact was primarily an alliance concluded as a means of deterring the entry of the United States into the war in Europe or the war between Japan and China.

In documents appended to the pact it was also stipulated that Germany would “promote friendly understanding” and “offer its offices to this end” with regard to Japan-Soviet relations, which aimed to engender cooperation between the three countries and the Soviet Union. Adolf Hitler himself went one step further. In a meeting with Vyacheslav Molotov in mid-November 1940, he stated that it was “Germany and Russia’s duty to give consideration to improving relations between Japan and China,” and that depending on the circumstances it may be the case that “China too could join the sphere of influence of awakened countries.” Hitler thus indicated the possibility of the Republic of China under Chiang Kai-shek joining an envisaged four power alliance.

When considering the political and diplomatic character of the Tripartite Pact, in addition to its political intent and the diplomatic response of the United States and Great Britain, what cannot be overlooked are the political moves by the Soviet Union and the Republic of China in response to the pact.

Based on the above, this paper seeks to consider the historical significance of the Tripartite Pact from the following perspectives: (1) the situation in Germany and Europe, (2) relations between the Tripartite Pact and the Soviet Union and China, and (3) the Tripartite Pact as a means of deterrence.

1. The first Tripartite Pact negotiations and the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact

On November 5, 1937, Hitler summoned the leaders of the army, navy and air forces and foreign minister, to whom he announced that "...our first objective...must be to overthrow Czechoslovakia and Austria simultaneously," thus indicating his intention to invade Central Europe on Germany's eastern flank. With regard to how Britain would respond, Hitler was of the opinion that the British Empire was facing various difficulties in Ireland, India, East Asia and the Mediterranean. If Britain sought to intervene militarily to support Czechoslovakia it would mean becoming once again entangled in a protracted European war. It was for this reason that Hitler stated his conviction that "Britain will not participate in a war against Germany."¹ Thus having taken the world situation into account, including developments in the war between Japan and China, Hitler took the first steps towards German expansion in Europe.

Subsequently, on March 11, 1938, Hitler issued a final ultimatum to Austria and achieved its annexation. From the summer of 1938 Germany initiated negotiations on a tripartite military alliance (the first Tripartite Pact negotiations) with Japan and Italy, as a means of restraining Britain and France diplomatically, while embarking on a military operation to dismantle Czechoslovakia ("Fall Grün" (Case Green)).²

The hypothetical enemy at the first Tripartite Pact negotiations that started in the summer of 1938 was explicitly Britain, but Joachim von Ribbentrop's vision extended further, to make the pact one that would also function against the United States. For example, in a letter dated March 7, 1939, Ribbentrop wrote the following to Hiroshi Oshima, Japan's Ambassador to Germany. "More than anything, what Germany and Italy expect from Japan out of the Tripartite Pact is for the United States to be restrained and to maintain a neutral position. In other words, the predominant purpose of this agreement is ultimately political, to ensure that the United States remains uninvolved in Europe."³

For the Japanese, however, although the inclusion of Britain as a hypothetical enemy in addition to the Soviet Union was a contemplable proposition, the army, navy and foreign ministries were in full agreement that the United States of all countries was clearly beyond the bounds of such contemplation.⁴ From the outset, therefore, there was a significant and seemingly insurmountable gap between the strategic positions of Japan and Germany with regard to the United States. Furthermore, at the time it was remarkable that Japan Foreign Minister Kazushige Ugaki underlined the high degree of circumspection about making such a grave diplomatic judgment. "To become embroiled against our will in what are purely and simply European problems would be fraught with tremendous danger."⁵

Subsequently, in the autumn of 1938 the different views between Germany and Japan

¹ Aufzeichnung Hoßbach, 10. November 1937, *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik 1918-1945* (folgend zitiert als *ADAP*), D-I, Nr. 19, S. 25-32.

² „Weisung für Fall Grün“, 30. Mai 1938, in: *ADAP*, C-II, Nr. 221, S. 281-285.

³ Letter from Ambassador Oshima to Foreign Minister Arita, March 7, 1939, *Gendai-shi Shiryo* (Modern History Materials), Vol. 10, Misuzu Shobo, 1964, pp. 224-225; Kato, Yoko, *Mosaku Suru 1930 Nendai* (Exploring the 1930s), Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1993, pp. 81-122. The author is the first person who observes this point in the history of theories.

⁴ Telegram from Minister Ugaki to Ambassador Togo, August 31, 1938, *Gendai-shi Shiryo*, Vol. 10, p. 181.

⁵ Ibid.

were decisively underlined when the new Foreign Minister Hachiro Arita, who intended to change the direction concerning the target of the pact. That is to say, in the Five Ministers' Conference held on November 11, Arita clearly stated that the main target of any pact should be the Soviet Union, noting that "This agreement is targeted predominantly at the Soviet Union. If the Britain, France or another power were to join the Soviet Union, they would also be included as target, but this does not mean that Britain, France or another power by themselves would be recognized as target." Debate became further enflamed in Japan and the Konoe Cabinet was obliged to resign. At this point it can be said that Japan was still working along the lines of strategic reason, both from the perspective of its cautious stance on becoming involved in European issues, and its reluctance to antagonize the United States.

The following year, in April of 1939, the situation was further complicated for the Cabinet of Kiichiro Hiranuma when Ambassador Oshima and Toshio Shiratori, Ambassador to Italy, both exasperated by the ongoing imbroglio took it upon themselves to declare that Japan would also participate in the event of war with Britain and France. The two ambassadors even went as far as to demand themselves that they be recalled to Tokyo. It was following this situation that on May 2, the "Hiranuma Message" was conveyed to Germany and Italy and measures were taken to bring negotiations to a close. "(The Japanese Empire) is ready, in accordance with the provisions of an agreement, to engage in the provision of military support to Germany and Italy. However, in view of the situation in which Japan now finds itself, it is neither presently nor in the near future able to extend to them any effective military aid."⁶

Germany and Italy deserted Japan and on May 22, 1939, and concluded the Pact of Friendship and Alliance between Germany and Italy ("Pact of Steel") as a bilateral military alliance.⁷ However, Germany recognized that a bilateral alliance with Italy alone would be entirely insufficient to act as a deterrent against Britain and the United States. It was for this reason that at the end of June Germany made strong attempts to improve relations with the Soviet Union as an alternative to forming an alliance with Japan. However, Ribbentrop had not given up all hope of achieving a Japan-Germany alliance. Assuming that Japan would agree, he envisaged a three power alliance between Japan, Germany and the Soviet Union (or a four power alliance including Italy if the Pact of Steel were to be included). On July 1, Friedrich Schulenburg, German Ambassador to the Soviet Union, informed Vladimir Potemkin, Soviet Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, that Ribbentrop was contemplating the formation of a triple alliance between Japan, Germany and the Soviet Union and that this idea had also been informed to Ambassador Oshima in a meeting.⁸

What is of great interest is that at the same time, foreign ministry channels in Japan (said by some to be Yosuke Matsuoka and by others to be Ambassador Shiratori) were drawing up a memorandum entitled "The Way to End the China Incident both Immediately and Favorably,"

⁶ Ibid., pp. 262-264.

⁷ „Freundschafts- und Bündnisvertrag zwischen Deutschland und Italien“ vom 22. Mai 1939, in: *ADAP*, D-VI, Nr. 426, S. 466-468.

⁸ Запись Потемкина с ф. Шуленбургом, 1. Июля 1939 г, *Документы Внешней Политики СССР*, 1939 год, Том 22, Кн. 1, Москва 1992, Но. 402, стр. 514-516.

which could well be referred to as a “Proposal for a Four Power Alliance between Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union” (July 19, 1939). This document proposed the division of spheres of influence with the Soviet Union and contained the following observation. “If hostilities were to open between Britain and the Soviet Union, it would be advisable for Japan, Germany and Italy to cooperate with the Soviet Union and propose to convene a top secret general staff meeting among Japan, the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy against Britain, the United States and France. (...) The power of cooperation among Japan, the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy would certainly be no inferior to cooperation among Britain, the United States and France in terms of diplomacy, war and economics.”⁹

In other words, this memorandum envisaged that cooperation among the four countries of Japan, the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy would act as a deterrent to Britain, the United States (and France), both diplomatically and militarily. To put it another way, the author of this memorandum believed that a tripartite alliance would be insufficient as a deterrent and therefore the inclusion of the Soviet Union was given importance from the perspective of acting as a deterrent against the United States. Furthermore, significant attention should be given to the fact that this memorandum went as far as to propose the convening of a “general staff meeting among Japan, the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy against Britain, the United States and France.”

Subsequently Germany chose the path of entering into an agreement with the Soviets and Ribbentrop made a hasty visit to Moscow, resulting in the shock of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact being concluded on August 23, 1939.

The shock of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact also reverberated around East Asia and that it precipitated the resignation of the Hiranuma Cabinet is well known, prompting the Prime Minister to declare that the “situation in Europe is complex and mysterious.” However, the conclusion of the pact also had repercussions in the Kwantung Army, which was engaged in the battle of Nomonhan, bringing about a transformation in understanding of the international situation. For example, on August 27, 1939, Commander of the Kwantung Army Kenkichi Ueda stated in a report that Japan should move to, “...thoroughly attack the Soviet Army in the Nomonhan area and use Germany and Italy to make the Soviet Union request an armistice, and at the same time, conclude a Japan-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact immediately. Furthermore, advance towards the conclusion of a military alliance with Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union against Britain to completely wipe out the foundation of Britain’s strength in the Far East.”¹⁰ Similarly to the abovementioned memorandum compiled through foreign ministry channels, this proposal from Ueda also sought to realize the formation of

⁹ Quoted in Hosoya, Chihiro, “Sangoku Domei to Nisso Churitsu Joyaku (1939-1941)” (“The Tripartite Pact and the Japan-Soviet Neutrality Pact (1939-1941)”), in *Nihon Kokusai Seiji-gakkai Taiheiyo Senso Gen’in Kenkyu-bu* (The Japan Association of International Relations, Research Division into Causes of the Pacific War) ed., *Taiheiyo Senso e no Michi* (Road to the Pacific War), Vol. 5, Asahi Shimbunsha, 1963, pp. 237-238.

¹⁰ *Gendai-shi Shiryo*, Vol. 10, p. 133.

a Japan-Soviet-Germany-Italy alliance that would oppose Britain.¹¹ However, it should be noted that in contrast to the foreign ministry memorandum, Ueda envisaged an alliance against Britain, rather than against the United States.

2. The outbreak of the Second World War in Europe and the concept of a Sino-German-Soviet triple alliance

The conclusion of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact provided the trigger for the Second World War. Japan was stunned by the conclusion of the pact and Ambassador Oshima, who had been advancing “negotiations to strengthen the Anti-Comintern Pact” with Germany, was recalled. Japan-Germany relations rapidly cooled.

The first major turning point in the war in Europe came with Germany’s victory over France (the armistice was signed on June 22, 1940). The northern region of France was placed under direct German occupation and the puppet Vichy government was established in the south. This victory meant that almost the entirety of the European continent, with the exception of a few neutral countries, came under the rule of Germany and her allies and quasi-allies. It appeared that Germany had succeeded to all intents and purposes in forming a “new order in Europe.”

This upheaval in the international situation in Europe had a significant impact on Sino-Japanese war and the international situation in East Asia. Firstly, in Japan momentum increased to take advantage of Germany’s “new order” and advance into the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina, which were both in a power vacuum. On June 17, 1940, Georges Catroux, Governor-General of French Indochina, acquiesced to Japanese pressure and completely closed off the supply route to China. Subsequently, on August 30, 1940, a military agreement was signed between Japan and the Vichy government of French Indochina (known as the Matsuoka-Henry Pact).¹² The French authorities in Indochina were obliged to agree to the stationing of the Japanese military in Vietnam and the loan of air force bases in northern Vietnam.

Secondly, on July 22, 1940, the British government of national unity under Churchill firmly rejected a peace offer made by Hitler and was faced with the necessity of concentrating all the British Empire’s military resources in Europe. As a result of this situation, in East Asia the British were forced to submit to Japanese pressure and on July 17 the Burma Road was closed.

The administration of Chiang Kai-shek engaged in various measures to deal with the situation in Europe. Initially, on May 21, Ding Wen Yuan, Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Berlin met with Herr Knoll of the Political Affairs Bureau of the German Foreign Ministry to request German intermediation between China and Japan.¹³ On July 10, Chiang Kai-shek,

¹¹ Miyake, Masaki, *Stalin, Hitler to Nisso-Doku-I Rengo Koso* (Stalin, Hitler, and the Plan for the Coalition of Japan, the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy), Asahi Shimbunsha, 2007. This book presents similar perspective to my paper. However, it is my stance that the Tripartite Pact and the concept for the four power alliance need to be understood by taking account of Chinese factors.

¹² “Hokubu Futsuin Shinchu ni Kansuru Iwayuru ‘Matsuoka-Henry’ Kyotei” (“So-called ‘Matsuoka-Henry’ Pact Concerning Advance into Northern French Indochina,” August 30, 1940, in Gaimusho (Foreign Ministry), ed. *Nihon Gaiko Nenpyo Narabini Shuyo Bunsho* (Chronology of Japanese Diplomacy and Important Documents), Vol. 2, Hara Shobo, 1965, pp. 446-448.

¹³ Aufzeichnung Weizsäcker, 27. Mai 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-IX, Nr. 327, S. 364-365.

wishing to avoid arousing British, American and Soviet suspicions, wrote that although there was “no need to engage aggressively in overt diplomacy,” it was nonetheless important to “start to advance diplomacy with Germany on economic, military and cultural fronts.”¹⁴

The British decision to cave into to Japanese pressure and close the Burma Road on July 17 stoked anti-British and American feeling within the Chinese Nationalist Party, leading to a rapid increase in the number of people calling for a U-turn in diplomatic policy that would replace the pro-British and American stance with tripartite cooperation among China, Germany and the Soviet Union. The following day, July 18, an executive meeting of the Supreme Committee for National Defense was held, and although Chiang Kai-shek was absent, in his place, Son Fo (then president of the Legislative Yuan), made the following statement.

France has already capitulated and Britain is also likely to fall. Should Britain fall, in order to protect the Western hemisphere the United States would lose its capacity to remain alert to situations in other regions. Accordingly, the United States would likely withdraw from the Pacific and abandon East Asia. To date our nation’s diplomatic course has been with Britain, the United States, France and the Soviet Union, however Britain, the United States and France have become powerless and although the Soviet Union is a friendly nation, our relationship is lacking in closeness. Accordingly, for the purposes of our nation’s future foreign policy, our interests should lie in cultivating friendship not only with the Soviet Union and Germany, but also with Italy. To the extent that Britain and France have both assisted Japan in closing off China’s supply routes and obstructing our war against Japan, on the day on which the Burma Road was closed we should have recalled our ambassadors to Britain and France and at the same time announced our decision to withdraw from the League of Nations.¹⁵

Realizing the political atmosphere within the executive meeting of the Supreme Committee for National Defense, on July 20 Chiang Kai-shek called a meeting of leaders and engaged in a forceful argument to persuade them of his view. Thus it was that Chiang’s leadership paid off, leading to the initiative for a tripartite alliance between China, Germany and the Soviet Union being put on hold for the time being.¹⁶ At the same time, however, in mid-August Chiang decided to dispatch General Gui Yongqing, a supporter of closer ties with

¹⁴ Chiang Kai-shek diary, July 10, 1940, in Lu, Fang-shang ed., *Jiang Zhongzheng xian sheng nian pu chang bian* (A Chronicle of Chiang Kai-shek), Vol. 6, Taipei: Academica Historica, National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, Chiang Kai-shek Educational Foundation, pp. 348-349.

¹⁵ Lu, Xijun, “Oshu Jousei e no Taio to Nichi-Doku-So Kankei e no shochi” (“Response to the Situation in Europe and Handling of Japan-Germany-Soviet Relations”), in National Institute for Defense Studies, ed., *International Forum on War History: Taiheiyō Senso to Rengo-koku no Tainichi Senryaku* (The Pacific War and the Allied Strategy Against Japan), March 2009, p. 108; “Meeting of 36th Executive Meeting of Supreme Committee for National Defense” (July 18, 1940), in Historical Committee of the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, ed., *Minutes of Executive Meetings of the Supreme Committee for National Defense*, Taipei: Modern China Publishing, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 476-477.

¹⁶ Lu, Xijun, op. cit., p. 109; Lu, Fang-shang ed., *Jiang Zhongzheng xian sheng nian pu chang bian*, Vol. 6, p. 356.

Germany, as military attaché at the embassy in Germany. In this way he was keeping the “Germany card” in play and preparing for any new developments in Europe.¹⁷

3. Conclusion of the Tripartite Pact and “Japan-Germany-Italy-Soviet (+China) bloc”

However, Germany’s predominance in Europe did not continue for long. On September 7, 1940 Germany launched its “Blitz” on London intending to surrender the Britain, but this attack was met by fierce resistance from the British air force (“The Battle of Britain”). Germany also planned an operation for the British mainland landings (“Operation Sea Lion”) and an operation to attack Gibraltar (“Operation Felix”), which assumed that Spain would join the Tripartite Pact. All of these planned operations ended in failure, however, and Germany found that it had exhausted military means of seeking to conquer Britain. The threat of defeat for Britain dwindled and in strategic terms a kind of stalemate ensued.

Hitler was forced to consider why Britain had not accepted his proposal for peace. In a meeting with leaders of the armed forces on July 31, he gave his provisional conclusions thus.

Britain’s hopes lie with Russia and America. If hope for Russia is lost, then so too will hope for the United States disappear. This is because if Russia falls, the value of Japan in East Asia would increase tremendously.

In other words, in Hitler’s view Russia was a “British-U.S. sword pointed at Japan” and if the Soviet Union could be eliminated, Japanese military power could be unleashed in East Asia. He anticipated that the United States would become embroiled in a Pacific conflict that would make it extremely difficult to extend assistance to Britain. Hence, “The toppling of Russia would eliminate the last hope for Britain.” Hitler’s idea through the toppling of the Soviet Union was to use Japan as a deterrent against the United States and in so doing seek to overcome Britain. Hitler issued the following order to force the surrender of Britain. “Decision. In the midst of such a confrontation we must eliminate Russia. Spring 1941.”¹⁸

This decision, however, was not necessarily the “final decision” to wage war against the Soviets. This was because there was still a possibility that developments in the international situation could enable the “sword of Britain and the United States” not to be overcome militarily, but rather by bringing it over to the Axis side by political means.

It was against this backdrop that the Tripartite Pact between Japan, Germany and Italy was hastily signed as a diplomatic means of deterring the entry of the United States into the war and placing further pressure on Britain with a view to forcing its surrender. The third article of the pact stipulated that if one of the contracting powers were to be attacked by “a Power at present not involved in the European War or in the Japanese-Chinese conflict,” they would provide mutual assistance, and although this could be read as being targeted at the United States and the Soviet Union, the fifth article of the pact confirmed that the political status

¹⁷ *Archives of President Chiang Kai-shek*, July 27, 1940, Vol. 44, *Academica Historica*, 2010, p. 110.

¹⁸ Franz, Halder; Arbeitskreis für Wehrforschung Stuttgart (Hrsg.), *Kriegstagebuch*, Bd. I-III, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1962-1964, Bd. II, S. 46-50.

existing in relations with the Soviet Union, including the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, would be maintained. Additionally, in documents appended to the pact it was also stipulated that Germany would “promote friendly understanding” and “offer its offices to this end” with regard to Japan-Soviet relations, which aimed to engender cooperation between the Tripartite Powers Japan, Germany and Italy, and the Soviet Union.¹⁹

In response to this provision, on October 3 the Japanese foreign ministry quickly drew up a “Proposal for Guidelines Adjusting Relations between Japan and the Soviet Union.” There is a notable point in the seventh article, which after having set out a concept for the division of spheres of influence in East Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Asia, goes on to state the following. “The Tripartite Powers will offer cooperation to the Soviet Union in the construction of a new order. On this basis, the Tripartite Powers will work ceaselessly to bring the Soviet Union into the alliance to create a four power alliance.”²⁰

In Germany Foreign Minister Ribbentrop was similarly promoting a proposal for a four power alliance. He sent a letter dated October 13, 1940 to Stalin in which he requested that Foreign Minister Molotov visit Germany and stated the following with regard to relations among Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union. “In the Führer’s view, it is the historical mission of the Four Powers of the Soviet Union, Italy, Japan, and Germany to adopt a long-range policy and to direct the future development of their peoples into the right channels by delimitation of their interests on a world-wide scale.”²¹ Both Japan and Germany, therefore were seeking to bring the Soviet Union into the Tripartite Pact and strengthen their deterrence against the United States based on the division of spheres of influence.

Stalin himself was also amenable to the notion of a four power alliance. In response to Ribbentrop’s request, on November 9 Stalin compiled detailed instructions for Molotov concerning negotiations with Ribbentrop. These directed that detailed confirmation should be obtained for the “plan (in his mind)” for “Soviet spheres of influence” that the Tripartite Pact countries would provide to the Soviet Union. Stalin sought to confirm to which nations the regions of Outer Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet and India would be allocated. Stalin also indicated for reference to China in a secret protocol that should be negotiated and signed with Berlin. The protocol should confirm that the Soviet Union was prepared to join Germany in mediating a settlement in the Sino-Japanese war and in such an event it would be necessary for China (Chiang Kai-shek) to seek “peace with honor.” It could be said that following Germany’s victory over France and France’s subsequent lean towards the Axis powers through the establishment of the Vichy government, Stalin sought to resolve the matter of war between Japan and China through the “Vichy-fication” of the Chiang Kai-shek administration.²²

¹⁹ Gaimusho, ed., *Nihon Gaiko Nenpyo Narabini Shuyo Bunsho*, Vol. 2, pp. 459-462.

²⁰ Quoted in Hosoya, Chihiro, “Sangoku Domei to Nisso Churitsu Joyaku (1939-1941)”, pp. 226-268. Cf. Mori, Shigeki, “Matsuoka Gaiko to Nisso Kokko Chosei” (Matsuoka Diplomacy and Adjustments in Japan-Soviet Diplomatic Relations,” in *Rekishigaku Kenkyu* (Journal of Historical Studies), Vol. 801, 2005. The author gained internal access to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and analyzed the facts behind the initiative for a “quadruple entente.”

²¹ Ribbentrop an Stalin, 13. Oktober 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband I, Nr. 176, S. 248-253.

²² Некоторые Директивы к Берлинской Поездке, 9. Ноября 1940 г., *Документы Внешней Политики СССР*, Том 23. Кн. 2 (часть 1), Но. 491, Стр. 30-32.

Molotov travelled to Berlin carrying these indications from Stalin and held talks with Hitler and Ribbentrop. At their final meeting on the evening of November 13, Ribbentrop presented Molotov with a proposal for a “quadruple entente” among Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union (the “Ribbentrop Proposal”). The proposal comprised two articles and two secret protocols. The secret protocol stipulated the “territorial objectives of the four powers,” with each power being apportioned spheres of interest: Germany would gain central Africa, Italy would be granted North and Northeast Africa, Japan would take regions south of the Japanese home islands and Manchukuo, and the Soviet Union would be allocated the Indian Ocean region. This protocol was deeply anti-British in its composition, as it sought to divide the “total assets of a bankrupted British Empire” among the four powers.²³

However, as had been expected, the Soviet Union responded with a counterproposal of its own that was extremely broad in its demands. After returning to Moscow, on November 26 Molotov handed a formal response to the Ribbentrop Proposal to Ambassador Schulenburg. While this counterproposal indicated that the Soviet Union was “prepared to accept” the four power agreement proposed on November 13, its conditions were the following four demands. (1) The withdrawal of the German military from Finland, (2) securing of Soviet security in Bulgaria and the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, (3) acceptance of Soviet demands covering regions from Batumi and Baku to the Persian Gulf, and (4) the renunciation of Japanese rights to coal and oil concessions in Northern Sakhalin.²⁴

Hitler is said to have been enraged with the Soviets’ demands. On December 18, he issued “Führer Directive 21 – Operation Barbarossa,” which ordered the German armed forces (Wehrmacht) to prepare for war against the Soviet Union.²⁵ It was with this directive that Germany diplomacy, which had wavered between Hitler’s argument for war and Ribbentrop’s concept for a four power continental bloc, crystallized into a unified policy to engage in war against the Soviets.

It should be added here that in Japanese foreign ministry the four power alliance concept was considered to be important as a means of achieving peace with the Chiang Kai-shek administration by relying on the influence of Germany and the Soviet Union. One of the backdrops of these moves is an existence of the so-called “Chien Yung-ming Scheme,” that the Japanese government simultaneously advanced. Based on the premise that the “Chien Yung-ming Scheme” would make progress, on October 8, 1940 a meeting of the army, navy and foreign ministers decided on “The Matter of Peace Negotiations with Chongqing.” What is notable in this decision is to state that “In order to facilitate negotiations, if necessary the mediation of Germany should be sought,” and that “utilizing the improvement of relations with the Soviet Union is also possible.” This “Chien Yung-ming Scheme,” which sought peace between Japan and China, continued in tandem with negotiations with Germany and the Soviet

²³ Aufzeichnung Hilgers, 18. November 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband I, S.472-478.

²⁴ Schulenburg an das AA, 26. November 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband II, Nr. 404. S. 597-598.

²⁵ Hilters “Weisung Nr. 21 Fall Barbarossa”, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband II, Nr. 532. S. 750-753.

Union.²⁶

Under this policy, on October 7 Matsuoka met in Tokyo with Eugen Ott, German Ambassador to Japan, in order to explore whether Japan could expect “German support” for direct negotiations with Chiang Kai-shek.²⁷ In addition, Deputy Foreign Minister Chuichi Ohashi met with Ott on November 13, and made the following requests: (1) Germany to use its influence with the Soviet Union to induce the Soviets to accept a Japanese-Soviet nonaggression pact, (2) Germany to use its influence with the Soviet Union to induce the Soviets to halt assistance to the Chiang Kai-shek administration, and (3) Germany to use its influence with Chiang Kai-shek to encourage the conclusion of a peace agreement with Japan.²⁸ It is clear that Japan’s intention was to use German mediation between Japan and the Soviet Union to also achieve peace between Japan and China.

Receiving these Japan’s wishes, on November 11 Ribbentrop called Chinese Ambassador Chen Jie to the foreign ministry. Indicating that there was a possibility of Germany recognizing the administration of Wang Jingwei, Ribbentrop resorted to political intimidation, asking Chen if there was any possibility that the Chiang Kai-shek administration would compromise with Japan.²⁹ Furthermore, in talks with Molotov on November 12 and 13, Hitler himself stated that it was “Germany and Russia’s duty to give consideration to improving relations between Japan and China,³⁰ and that depending on the situation “China too could join the sphere of influence of awakened countries,” thus indicating a possibility that China could be added to the concept for a four power alliance.³¹ It could be said that within this concept for a Eurasian continental bloc, Hitler envisaged first conciliation between Japan and China, followed by the granting of a position to China similar to that of Vichy France. Both Hitler and Stalin were of one mind when it came to policy concerning China.

Chiang Kai-shek, however, viewed the Tripartite Pact from a completely different angle. Firstly, his view of the Tripartite Pact being signed within barely three weeks was that it had been forced through based on the “blind assertions of impetuous militarists,” and that

²⁶ “Tai-Jukei Kosaku no Ken” (“Matter Relating to Chongqing”), (Decision of the army, navy and foreign ministers, October 1, 1940), in *Nihon Kokusai Seiji-gakkai Taiheiyō Senso Gen’in Kenkyū-bu* (The Japan Association of International Relations, Research Division into Causes of the Pacific War) ed., *Taiheiyō Senso e no Michi (Road to the Pacific War)* Appendices, Asahi Shimbunsha, 1963, p. 302.

²⁷ Ott an das AA, 8. Oktober 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband I, Nr. 161, S. 229.

²⁸ Ott an das AA, 11. November 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband I, Nr. 311, S. 431-432.

²⁹ Telegram between Chen Jie and Chiang Kai-shek (November 11, 1940), in Historical Committee of the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, ed. *Zhonghua Minguo zhong yao shi liao chu bian -- dui Ri kang zhan shi* (First Volume of Important Historical Documents of the Republic of China), Vol. 3, (Wartime Diplomacy (2)), pp.966-700; Aufzeichnung Stahmer, 11. November 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband I, Nr. 315, S. 434-435; Chou, Whei-ming, “Nichi-Doku Domei to Chugoku Tairiku: ‘Manshukoku’ - O Sei-Ei ‘Seiken’ wo Meguru Kosho Katei” (“The Japan-Germany Alliance and the Chinese Continent: Negotiation Processes Surrounding ‘Manchukuo’ and the Wang Jingwei ‘Administration’”), in Kudo, Akira and Tajima, Nobuo, eds., *Nichi-Doku Kankeishi 1890-1945* (History of Japanese-German Relations, 1890-1945, Vol. 2 - Multiple Dynamics of the Axis Formation), University of Tokyo Press, 2008, pp. 145-173.

³⁰ Aufzeichnung Schmidt, 15. November 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband I, Nr. 328, S. 462-472.

³¹ Aufzeichnung Schmidt, 16. November 1940, in: *ADAP*, D-XI, Teilband I, Nr. 326, S. 455-461.

the execution of Japan's diplomatic policies was "hurried and nonsensical."³² Secondly, in Chiang's view the Tripartite Pact would only serve to strengthen the United States' policy of containment to Japan, and in that sense he saw the formation of the pact as being beneficial for China. For Chiang, "The conclusion of the Tripartite Pact is a turning point towards the ultimate victory of China and at the same time the biggest key to Japan's failure."³³ Thirdly, in Chiang's view the pact was "clearly a means of luring China into their stratagem," but the granting of an "appropriate position" to China was "nothing more than the dreams of Japanese pirates." This demonstrates that Chiang had seen through Japan and Germany's "Vichy-fication" strategy for the government of the Republic of China. However, fourthly, Chiang thought that there was no need to overtly oppose the proposal for German mediation between Japan and China. This was out of a desire to ensure that Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union did not "treat China as lightly as they have done heretofore."³⁴ Chiang therefore sought to use the proposal of tripartite mediation in the Sino-Japanese war to his own advantage, namely elevating China's international standing with Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union.

On October 31 Chiang recorded in his diary, "Peace between Japan and China is a bad policy."³⁵ For the Chinese the "Chien Yung-ming Scheme" was nothing more than a ploy to delay the approval of the Wang Jingwei administration.³⁶ In such a situation on November 28 Japan decided to cease negotiations with the Republic of China. On November 30 the "Japan-China Basic Relations Treaty" was concluded, which recognized the Wang Jingwei administration.³⁷

4. Hitler's "Operation Barbarossa" and the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact

For Hitler, the Eastern Front was a strategic means of forcing Britain to surrender. However, on the other hand it also had the strategic purpose of "creating an Eastern Empire under the rule of Germanic peoples," which was something Hitler had continued to call for since writing *Mein Kampf*. Therefore, for Hitler, war with the Soviet Union was different in nature from the "normal European wars" such as those with France or Britain. It took on the character of an

³² Diary of Chiang Kai-shek, September 30, 1940, in Lu, Fang-shang ed., *Jiang Zhongzheng xian sheng nian pu chang bian*, Vol. 6, p. 409.

³³ Lu, Xijun, "Oshu Jousei e no Taio to Nichi-doku-so Kankei e no Taisho", pp. 110-113 in particular; Lu, Fang-shang ed., *Jiang Zhongzheng xian sheng nian pu chang bian*, Vol. 6, pp. 407-408.

³⁴ Diary of Chiang Kai-shek, September 30, 1940, in Lu, Fang-shang ed., *Jiang Zhongzheng xian sheng nian pu chang bian*, Vol. 6, p. 409.

³⁵ Diary of Chiang Kai-shek, October 31, 1940, in Lu, Fang-shang ed., *Jiang Zhongzheng xian sheng nian pu chang bian*, pp. 429-430.

³⁶ For details of the "Chien Yung-ming Scheme" see Shimada, Toshihiko, "Nikka Jihen ni Okeru Wahei Kosaku—Toku ni 'Kiri Kosaku' Oyobi 'Matsuoka-Sen Eimei Kosaku' ni Tsuite" (2), ("Peace Schemes in the China Incident—Particularly the 'Kiri Scheme' and the 'Matsuoka-Chien Yung-ming Scheme'" (2)), in *Musashino Daigaku Jinbun Gakkai Zasshi* (The Journal of Human and Cultural Sciences), Vol. 3, No. 2, 1971, pp. 1-23.

³⁷ "Nihon Koku Chuka Minkoku Kan Kihon Kankei ni Kansuru Joyaku" ("Treaty Concerning Basic Relations Between Japan and the Republic of China" (November 30, 1940), in Gaimusho, ed. *Nihon Gaiko Nenpyo Narabini Shuyo Bunsho*, Vol. 2, pp. 466-474; Chou, Whei-ming, "Nichi-Doku Domei to Chugoku Tairiku: 'Manshukoku' - O Sei-Ei 'Seiken' wo Meguru Kosho Katei", pp. 145-173.

ideological “war of racial annihilation.”

From this point it can be said that for Hitler the Eastern Front and relations between Germany and Japan presented two important consequences. Firstly, the war with the Soviets was for Hitler a “holy war” with racism that should be fought single-handedly by the Germanic peoples. This conviction gave rise to Hitler’s stance that Japanese participation in a war with the Soviet Union would not necessarily be positive. Besides, as it was anticipated that the war with the Soviet Union would be won and finished within a few weeks or a few months, during this period of German military advantage Hitler was almost entirely uninterested in Japanese involvement in the war. Secondly, war with the Soviet Union was one on which Hitler’s “means” and “purpose” depended. In other words his very political life depended on the war. Accordingly, it was inevitable that this must be a war with no amicable settlement. The options of conditional peace or separate peace were eliminated from the outset.³⁸

On March 5, 1941, “Führer Directive 24” was issued in the name of Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, which gave orders for “Cooperation with Japan.” Predicated on the order that “No mention whatever of undertaking Operation Barbarossa will be made to the Japanese,” the directive noted that “The purpose of the cooperation based on the Tripartite Pact must be to induce Japan to take action in the Far East as soon as possible,” and specific mention was made of “the seizure of Singapore, Britain’s key position in East Asia.” It was anticipated that a Japanese attack on Singapore would “tie down strong British forces and divert the main concern of the United States to East Asia.”³⁹ The core of Hitler’s strategy with regard to Japan, therefore, was to say nothing about the war with the Soviet Union, and instead to incite Japan to attack and overcome the British in Singapore, and use Japan as a means of deterring the United States.

Japan was entirely unaware of German intentions and indicated its readiness to continue negotiations with the Soviet Union. Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka departed Japan on March 12, 1941 and from March 27 to 29 held a number of meetings with Hitler and Ribbentrop. What became clear from this series of meetings was that Germany was totally uninterested in mediating between Japan and the Soviet Union, and that it was rather more intent on Japan engaging in an attack on Singapore. In his meeting with Ribbentrop on March 28 Matsuoka stated that, “Without German’s efforts and military power there is absolutely no chance for an improvement in Japan-Soviet relations,” thus indicating Japan’s hope for German mediation. However, in response Ribbentrop asserted that “Soviet entry to the Tripartite Pact is out of the question.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, in his opening remarks in the meeting held on March 29, Ribbentrop sought to incite action, stating that, “Japan should advance south and attack Singapore, without worrying about any interference from Russia.”⁴¹

After his meetings in Berlin, Matsuoka traveled to Italy and met with Prime Minister Benito Mussolini and Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano in Rome. He then returned to Berlin

³⁸ Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung 1940-1941*, München: Bernard&Graf Verlag, S. 566-567, S. 572.

³⁹ Weisung Nr. 24. Über Zusammenarbeit mit Japan, in: *ADAP*, D-XII, Teilband I, Nr. 182, S. 181-182.

⁴⁰ Aufzeichnung ohne Unterschrift, 31. März 1941, in: *ADAP*, D-XII, Teilband I, Nr. 230. S. 334-337.

⁴¹ Aufzeichnung ohne Unterschrift, 31. März 1941, *ADAP*, D-XII, Teilband I, Dok. Nr. 233, S. 340-346.

before heading to Moscow. Talks with Molotov resulted in deadlock over the issue of oil and coal concessions on Northern Sakhalin, but at the end of the negotiations Stalin himself joined the meeting. The result was that with precipitous speed, following slight compromises on the wording, the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact was concluded on April 13.⁴²

5. Outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union and failure of deterrence against the United States

At dawn on June 22, 1941 the Germany army launched a major offensive into Soviet territory. The attack went ahead without any formal notice being provided to Japan. To borrow the words of Fumimaro Konoe, this was Germany's "second act of betrayal," following the "first act of betrayal (the conclusion of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact)". Germany's invasion against the Soviet Union dealt a tremendous political blow to Japan's government and people.⁴³

Furthermore, the outbreak of German-Soviet war had a massive impact on the strategic value of the Tripartite Pact. Firstly, the opening of hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union destroyed the deterrence strategy against the United States that had been intended by bringing the Soviet Union into the Tripartite Pact. Secondly, because Germany's opening of hostilities meant that its military forces would be concentrated on the Soviet front, thus drastically reducing the capacity of Germany to act as a deterrent to the United States. The Tripartite Pact had been rendered virtually worthless as a United States deterrence strategy. Japan now found itself unexpectedly in a situation that hearkened back to time of the "Hiranuma Message," where the Tripartite Pact had become a dead letter, and Japan could extricate itself from the situation in Europe and concentrate on negotiations with the United States. This presented an opportunity to move from a stance of military deterrence to diplomatic negotiation. However, in contrast to the situation two years ago the Japanese government failed to capitalize on this opportunity.

There were broadly divided opinions within the government and the army on how to respond to the German-Soviet war. It goes without saying that one argument was to take advantage of the lessening of pressure on the northern front with the Soviet Union and advance southwards in order to resolve Japan's resource-related problems (Southern Expansion Doctrine), and the other was to join Germany and engage in a pincer attack on the Soviet Union, thus ensuring security on the northern front (Northern Expansion Doctrine).

Prime Minister Konoe and Foreign Minister Matsuoka were already at odds over the "Japan-U.S. Draft of Mutual Understanding Plan" and Japan's policy for negotiations with the United States, and disagreement over policy towards the German-Soviet war further cemented this confrontation. At the Imperial General Headquarters and Government Liaison Conference on June 25 a decision was made to advance southward into southern French Indochina and at the Imperial Council on July 2 the "Guidelines for Imperial National Policy associated

⁴² Boris Slavinsky, *Kosho—Nisso Churitsu Joyaku* (The Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact), Iwanami Shoten, 1996.

⁴³ Hosoya, Chihiro, "Sangoku Domei to Nisso Churitsu Joyaku (1939-1941)", p. 311.

with Developments in the Situation” was approved.⁴⁴ This decision meant that while Japan continued to prepare for war with the Soviet Union it also had to be prepared for war with Britain and the United States in order to advance southwards. Matsuoka, a vocal proponent of the northern expansion doctrine, found himself isolated within the Konoe Cabinet that was focused on southern expansion. On July 18 the third Konoe Cabinet was formed, which in reality was a ploy to remove Matsuoka from his position.

On July 28, under the third Konoe Cabinet, Japan executed its advance into southern French Indochina. On August 1 the United States responded by placing a total ban on oil exports to Japan. The United States deterrence strategy had failed entirely. In the Imperial Council of September 6 an “Outline of Imperial National Policy” was approved,⁴⁵ and it was decided to aim to complete preparations for war with Britain, the United States and the Netherlands by the end of October. During the same period negotiations with the United States reached deadlock and although the Tojo Cabinet, which was formed on October 18, sought to achieve a breakthrough, the Imperial Council of November 5 approved an “Outline of Imperial National Policy” that resolved to go to war with Britain, the United States and the Netherlands.⁴⁶

On November 15 the Imperial General Headquarters and Government Liaison Conference approved the “Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of the War against Britain, the United States and the Netherlands, and Chiang.” This proposal stated that, “First of all, Japan, Germany and Italy will cooperate and will work for the surrender of Britain, and at the same time endeavor to destroy the will of the United States to fight,” which assumed to the German victory over Britain. Furthermore, with regard to the German-Soviet war it was stated that, “We keep in mind the possibilities of arranging a peace between Germany and the Soviet Union, depending on the wishes of these two countries, and bringing the Soviet Union within the Axis camp; of improving Japanese-Soviet relations; and, depending on circumstances, of encouraging the Soviets to push into Iran and India.” This indicates that there were expectations for the realization of peace between Germany and the Soviet Union. Japan was still clinging to the hope of achieving a four power alliance among Japan, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union.⁴⁷

Following Japan’s decision to open hostilities against the United States, towards the end of November the Tripartite Pact countries launched negotiations on a treaty concerning a “no separate peace” agreement and reciprocal obligations. The three countries reached a basic agreement on this treat at the end of November, but as negotiations concerning the formal signing of the treaty were continuing Japan launched its attack on Pearl Harbor, triggering the Pacific War.

⁴⁴ Gaimusho, ed. *Nihon Gaiko Nenpyo Narabini Shuyo Bunsho*, Vol. 2, pp. 531-532.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 544-545.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Taiheiyo Senso e no Michi*, Appendices, pp. 583-586.

Conclusion

On May 15, 1936, approximately five years before the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Defense Economy and Armament Office, the Reich Ministry of Defense of Germany drafted a report to Defense Minister Werner von Blomberg titled “Situation of the Defense Economy of Japan,” in which the following was stated. “It is possible that Japan will simply take only active economic warfare measures against China.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, on May 18, the German air force also submitted a report concerning the Soviet air force in the Far East, in which the following was stated. “There is a real possibility that the threat from the Soviet Far East air force could keep Japanese air force power fully occupied. It is also possible that in a short period the Soviets could redeploy many squadrons from western Russia.”⁴⁹ Next, on May 19, a report was also submitted by the German navy. “In the event that both Anglo-Saxon nations were to engage in joint action resulting in a prolonged war, Japan would be driven to surrender as its economic sea lines of communication would be almost entirely cut off.”⁵⁰

However, the highlight was a detailed 15-page report from the General Staff of the army. Chief of third section Carl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel submitted the following report on May 16, which was approved by Chief of the General Staff Ludwig Beck. “Even if a Japan-Soviet war erupts, this would not have a decisive impact on the stance of Soviet power politics in Europe. Rather, it would be the case that a Japan-Soviet war would embroil Japan’s allies in Europe in a major conflict with Britain and the United States.” (emphasis reproduced from original)⁵¹ The report concluded with the grave warning that if a Japan-Germany military alliance were to be formed and war with the Soviet Union ensued, there was a risk that Germany would fall into a state of military conflict with Britain and the United States.

Thereafter, up until the outbreak of the Second World War the German armed forces lost its right to speak with regard to Hitler’s strategy and war leadership. Any gloom-laden outlooks such as the one described above about a Japan-Germany alliance failed to have any influence on Hitler. However, there are still some matters relating to the judgment on the Japan-Germany alliance that should be heeded. This paper will conclude by explaining on this judgment of the German armed forces, while maintaining the view set out in the introduction.

Firstly, from the perspective of the German and European situation, the conclusion of a bilateral military alliance between two geographically distant countries was one that was from the start unreasonable. A Japan-Germany alliance heightened the probability that Germany would become embroiled in conflict in East Asia, and similarly that Japan would be drawn into conflict in Europe. Although Japan at the time possessed one of the three largest naval forces in the world, it was preoccupied in dealing with the war with China and had no capacity to intervene in Europe. By allowing itself to become embroiled in a distant international conflict Japan’s diplomacy and military started to veer off course.

Secondly, Japan, Germany and Italy sought to form a four power alliance by bringing in

⁴⁸ Bericht des Wehrwirtschaftsstabes, 15. Mai 1936, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv im Freiburg im Breisgau, RW5/v. 315, „Akte Stein“.

⁴⁹ Bericht des Oberkommandos der Luftwaffe, 12. Mai 1936, ebenda.

⁵⁰ Bericht des Oberkommandos der Kriegsmarine, 19. Mai 1936, ebenda.

⁵¹ Bericht des Generalstabs des Heeres, 16. Mai 1936, ebenda.

the Soviet Union, as a means of raising deterrence against the United States. Furthermore, in searching for ways to end the Sino-Japanese war, Japan, Germany and also the Soviet Union went so far as to contemplate the inclusion of China in a four power alliance. However, it was almost unthinkable that China would accept such a “Vichy-fication” policy and Chiang Kai-shek himself seems to have welcomed the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact. Furthermore, by embarking on war with the Soviet Union, Hitler himself sought the destruction of the Soviet Union, which had previously been positioned as part of the deterrent against the United States.

Thirdly and finally, despite the fact that the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union eliminated any deterrence against the United States that the Tripartite Pact may have had, the Japanese government and military chose to maintain the alliance, which was a major factor in the failure of negotiations between Japan and the United States. The failure of this deterrence strategy conversely served to strengthen the United States’ resolve, leading to the tragedy of war with the United States.

Subsequently, the war proceeded as the German armed forces predicted ten years ago that “Japan would be driven to surrender by cutting off its economic sea lines of communication.”