

# The Specter of Revolution:

*The Domestic Sources of Japan's  
Decision to Surrender*

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World War II was the most devastating conflict the world had ever seen. In the Far East Theater, Japan and the United States battled for mastery of the Pacific. By 1944 it was clear that the Japanese Empire did not have the wherewithal to match the United States' war machine. Yet Japan persisted in the war until a large portion of the home islands were destroyed. It took an intervention by the Emperor in mid-August 1945, after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet declaration of war against Japan, to bring about a Japanese decision to surrender.

Why did Japan surrender? Most scholars have tended to focus on the military aspects that brought about Japan's capitulation, from the strategic bombing campaign to the atomic bombings that obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the shock of the Soviet entry into the Pacific War. Even Robert J.C. Butow's seminal work, *Japan's Decision to Surrender*,<sup>1</sup> which has long been regarded the traditional interpretation of the end of the Pacific War, implicitly emphasizes the military dimensions of the political decision to surrender. Butow argues that the worsening military situation divided the wartime ruling elite into a hardliner faction that wanted to fight to the finish and a peace faction that pressed for a prompt end to the hostilities; it took the atomic bombings and the Soviet entry to create an atmosphere where the Emperor could intervene to end the war. These interpretations shed light on the decision to surrender. But by focusing on the foreign dimension of the political decision to end the war while excluding a broader analysis of the domestic dimension, Butow and others only tell one, albeit critical, portion of the story.

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954)

The military situation was not the Japanese leaders' only concern by 1945. As the war became a desperate struggle for Japan, many key decision-makers began to perceive that they were fighting a losing battle on two fronts: foreign and domestic. On the foreign front, the Japanese military's fighting power and discipline steadily deteriorated in the face of Anglo-American might. The only way to counter the steady stream of military losses, military leaders reasoned, was to engage in *Ketsu-Go*, an all-out decisive battle for the homeland. On the domestic front, many elites were increasingly worried about both a communist fifth column waiting to destroy the *kokutai*<sup>2</sup> (national polity) from within and a deteriorating national morale that could be mobilized for the same purpose. Their only means of dealing with these fears of social revolution was to arrest increasing numbers of subversives for promoting 'dangerous thoughts,' but as we shall see, this had the opposite effect of making the elites feel even more apprehensive. Scholarly works that deal with Japanese leaders' concerns for the foreign front abound. Conversely, the fear of Japan's domestic situation as a motivating factor for capitulation has been left relatively unexplored.

This paper analyzes the domestic sources of the decision to surrender. Specifically, it explores the degree to which a near obsessive fear of social revolution among Japan's conservative ruling elite prompted the decision to end the war. To accomplish this aim, the paper will be divided into five distinct sections. The first section considers Japan's conservative ruling elite and discusses how the emergence of a fear of social revolution shaped their policy choices from the early twentieth century; the second section examines

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<sup>2</sup> *Kokutai* is a mystical approach to the Japan's imperial system, propagated with the idea of building nationalism and devotion to the state. The devotion Japan's conservative leaders felt to the *kokutai* is tantamount to devotion to the Emperor, the source of all power and legitimacy under the Meiji Constitution.

the specter of revolution that reemerged in wartime Japan and explains how concern over possible domestic revolution ironically led Japanese decision-makers to seek a negotiated peace through the Soviet Union; the third section centers on the peace plan Japanese leaders formulated in June 1945 and illustrates why the plan, which was formulated to prevent the outbreak of social revolution, ended in utter failure; the fourth section looks at the Emperor's intervention to end the war; and the final section concludes the paper and assesses the impact of the atomic bombings and the Soviet entry on the decision to surrender.

### **The Conservative Elite's Emergent Fear of the Masses**

Japanese governance has been distinct in the persistence of a conservative ruling elite. This conservative ruling elite – political, military, and economic elites that have served as key decision-makers and thus have a considerable stake in maintaining the existing political order – has, with brief interruptions, successfully been able to hold onto the reins of power since the Tokugawa Period. The ability to have done so is partly attributable to a native conservatism that bred a persistent fear of the masses' revolutionary potential. This native conservatism is not unlike the conservatism of the modern world, whose mission “has been not to defeat but to forestall revolutions, not to crush but anticipate them.”<sup>3</sup> Canadian diplomat-scholar E. H. Norman implicitly recognized that such conservatism, characterized by both a gnawing fear of the masses and a necessity to guide them, motivated leaders in Tokugawa Japan. “Because the masses were potentially dangerous, it was necessary to keep them stupid and obedient;

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Kenneth B. Pyle, “Meiji Conservatism,” in Marius B. Jansen (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Modern Japan: Volume 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 705.

but the oppression involved in this increased their resentment and potential danger. The problem, as Norman recognized, was not peculiar to Tokugawa Japan but to *modern* as well.”<sup>4</sup>

Japan’s modern political history began in 1868 with the Meiji Restoration. Utilizing a political crisis provoked by the arrival of the West – which subjected Japan to unequal treaties and incorporated her into the treaty port system nearly 15 years prior – members of the warrior elite from Satsuma and Choshu allied to overthrow the Tokugawa Bakufu. They did so for a number of reasons. Loyalty to their domains, the warrior elite’s traditional respect for power and its symbols, and a deep-rooted enmity towards the Bakufu contributed to the formation of an alliance between Satsuma and Choshu and the subsequent commitment to overthrow the Bakufu. In short, the values and traditions of feudal Japan led to the Meiji Restoration.

The same traditional values – particularly the military elite’s respect for power as the highest value and a loyalty that shifted to the nation over the domain – guided the Sat-Cho leaders’ ensuing decisions. They dissolved the feudal order, abolished the system of traditional privileges that made the samurai class special, and embarked on a national strengthening program to create a strong Japan capable of resisting Western power. In the process, many societal traditions were sacrificed to enhance national power and meet the challenge of the West. But, as Albert Craig notes, such sacrifices were not inspired by new ideas or values. “The Meiji Restoration,” he argues, “was not a revolution, not a change in the name of new values – such as *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité* in the French Revolution. Rather, it was what is far more common in history, a change carried out in

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<sup>4</sup> John W. Dower, “E. H. Norman, Japan and the Uses of History,” in Norman, E.H., *Origins of the Modern Japanese State* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975) p. 14

the name of old values. It was a change brought about by men intent on fulfilling the goals of their inherited tradition. It was a change brought about unwittingly by men who before 1868 had no conception of its eventual social ramifications.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, although its social consequences were revolutionary, Japan’s modern revolution – a nationalist revolution guided by a feudal military elite that valued power over culture and international status over Japan’s traditional institutions – was ironically fueled by conservative motives.

As such, the subsequent changes and continuities to Japan’s domestic and political orders reflected the conservative nature of the Meiji Restoration. The Emperor was restored to his traditional role as the source of political legitimacy at the head of the Japanese state. A conservative constitution, which enshrined the Emperor’s new position as the locus of sovereignty into the political system, was drafted under the notion that political dissent was subversive to the state’s goals of promoting national strength.<sup>6</sup> The constitution provided for a weak national assembly and a limited electorate not to advance democratic ideals but to achieve national unity and power. The Meiji leaders created a civil code that enshrined Japan’s Confucian-influenced values into the new society: the household became the foundation of a new hierarchical social structure with the Emperor designated as head of the national household. Land reform was not

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<sup>5</sup> Albert M. Craig, *Choshu in the Meiji Restoration* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000) p. 360.

<sup>6</sup> Ito Hirobumi, the drafter of the Meiji constitution, admitted that the purpose of the constitution itself was socially conservative – to limit political dissent. He stated, in reference to the political ideas behind the drafting of the constitution, “the onslaught of extremely democratic ideas had to be resisted because, ‘in a country such as ours, it was evident that it would be necessary to compensate for its smallness of size and population by a compact solidity of organization.’” Quoted in W.G. Beasley, *The Rise of Modern Japan*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995) p. 77. Thus, the Emperor became the locus of all sovereignty. He both appointed Cabinet ministers, who were responsible to his authority instead of the authority of the legislature, and exercised direct control over the military. Additionally, the constitution created the House of Peers to serve as a check on the Lower House, and attempted to limit the influence of the Lower House by only providing it with the power of the purse; it created a loophole that would enact the previous year’s budget if the Lower House refused to approve the budget plan.

pursued – instead, landholding was fully privatized, which concentrated landed property into fewer hands and left the wealthy peasants dominant in the countryside. Though they abolished the feudal order, the Meiji leaders conferred the former daimyo – Japan’s feudal lords – with membership in the new nobility and gave them considerable fortunes in the form of commutation bonds. The investment of these bonds in Japan’s national banking system ensured that some of the daimyo would be among the leaders of modern industry.<sup>7</sup> Government industrial policy provided additional benefits to an elite group of wealthy capitalists that led Japan’s economic growth. Finally, the Meiji leaders created an elite bureaucracy – one that became fiercely proud of its service to the Emperor and the *kokutai* – which only the most educated and ambitious could enter. These measures facilitated the emergence of a conservative elite that had considerable interest in maintaining the new order. As Stephen Vlastos notes,

The wealthy farmers, landlords, entrepreneurs, and the commercial and educated classes benefited enormously from the progressive reforms of Meiji – especially reforms that brought citizen equality, meritocracy, protection of private property, and promotion of capitalist economic growth... The propertied and educated had a sufficient material stake in the emerging social order to keep them from launching a truly radical attack on the government.

However, the classes marginalized by the Meiji reforms, groups that were losing social power as a result of modernization, faced an entirely different situation. The traditional warrior and small-scale subsistence farmer did not fit into the new order, and the government sacrificed their social needs quite ruthlessly to speed national integration and capital accumulation.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly who composed the conservative elite. Certainly the Meiji oligarchs initially formed the core of, and dominated, this group. The system of government the oligarchs established ensured that they – as the *genro*, an elite group of elder statesmen transcendental to the mechanics of the political order they created –

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<sup>7</sup> John W. Dower, “E.H. Norman,” p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Vlastos, “Opposition Movements in Early Meiji, 1868-1885,” in Marius B. Jansen, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 426-27.

would coordinate national policy. The genro, however – through the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889 and the creation of a large bureaucracy – fostered the emergence of additional elites, including leaders of the military, the House of Peers, the Privy Council, the court group, and an extensive civilian bureaucracy. Wealthy landlords, prominent industrialists, and influential journalists that held ties to power centers in Tokyo also emerged as important political influences. With the rise of political parties as a powerful elite group in the early twentieth century, party leaders as well entered the conservative elite. Finally, when the genro passed from the political scene, they were replaced by a much weaker advisory group of ex-premiers called the *jushin*.

This was not a monolithic group. Power struggles echoed the competing interests among the diverse elites, be they organizational or personal. As such, the composition of Japan's conservative elite changed over time as different groups attained greater political power. For instance, though the Meiji oligarchs initially dominated Japanese politics, the political party elites eventually replaced them as coordinators of the elite groups and, from 1918 to 1932, attained quasi-ascendancy in the political system; the parties were later replaced by a coalition of military and bureaucratic elites that were ascendant until the end of the Pacific War.

But focusing on the group dynamics within the political system obscures as much as it illuminates. Although infighting invariably occurred, the various elites were bound by both traditional values and practices and their collective vision of Japan's national purpose; such factors limited the scope of conflicts among the elites. Traditional values and practices included (1) a respect for power and status; (2) the formation of complex

webs of formal and informal connections – business and political relations, personal relations, and more importantly, marriage arrangements between members of powerful families – that helped members both achieve power and coordinate elite interests; and (3) a traditional conservatism – brought about by the considerable stake in the existing political order – that encouraged the elite groups to fear and work to forestall social revolution. More importantly, members of the conservative elite shared a vision of Japan's national purpose. They strove to fulfill the ultimate goals of the Meiji Restoration: the revision of the unequal treaties and the creation of a strong state the equal of the advanced Western powers.

Traditional values of hierarchy and respect for authority initially ensured that Japan's conservative leaders would have an unimpeded capacity to direct the foreign and domestic policy issues required to achieve these goals. This freedom in policymaking, aided by intelligent and pragmatic leadership, helped Japan achieve the former goal – the revision of the unequal treaties – by 1894 with the signing of the Aoki-Kimberley Treaty. The latter goal – the creation of a strong state the equal of the advanced industrial powers – Japanese leaders pursued through rapid industrialization. And they did so on the backs of the Japanese people. The government subsidized strategic industries that were in the national interest while leveling high taxes on the people. It favored armaments, investment goods, and comparative advantage for exports while neglecting consumption goods and the creation of a strong consumer-oriented economy. In short, the groups in control of the state created an industrial society but kept living standards low.

The conservative elite thus required a loyal populace that was willing to sacrifice for the good of the nation. For only by fostering a sense of national unity and mobilizing

the populace to its full potential could Japan, a late developing nation, hope to catch up with the advanced industrial powers. To create such a unity of purpose, the conservative elite fostered a nationalism based on traditional values of loyalty and obligation to the group. The 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education – a Confucian “pledge of allegiance” that was often read in public schools to stress such traditional values – helped coalesce the ideas of loyalty and group obligation into a transcendent loyalty and obligation to the Emperor and Nation. The nationalism inspired by the rescript cultivated the ideal Japanese subjects – ones that toiled and sacrificed for the good of the nation.

However, Japan’s conservative leaders realized that industrialization would have disruptive social and political consequences – from social dislocations to psychological strains – that could threaten Japan’s ability to rapidly industrialize. Such problems might even threaten the elites’ positions within the political order or even the political order itself. By the early twentieth century, these disruptive social and political consequences came into view through the breakdown of the traditional values that sustained Japanese nationalism. Thomas C. Smith notes the emergence of such problems:

Rationalist thought, which an educational system dedicated to the advancement of science and technology was bound to promote, gradually called into question central elements of the political myth – imperial divinity and the family state. Modern industry gave rise to new and harsher class antagonisms that made the ideals of solidarity and duty to superiors harder to cherish. The authority of the family and the power of its symbols declined as the family lost economic functions to the market, and as the difference in outlook between generations widened.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan, Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959) p. 205.

These problems were accompanied by the emergence of myriad heterodox ideas and other social dislocations. Such issues, however, did not have an immediate impact on the national polity. Groups within the bureaucracy, wary of the emergence of threats to the *kokutai*, initially dealt with them through a combination of social policy and police repression. Social policy included the passage of a Factory Act in 1911 to preclude the emergence of labor problems in the cities and the Local Improvement Movement (*chiho kairyo undo*) from 1900 to 1918 to foster a sense of unity and nationalism within local communities.<sup>10</sup> Police repression was also employed to handle emergent social problems that could threaten the *kokutai*. The Home Ministry broke up the nascent socialist party hours after its formation in 1901, shut down its newspaper, the *Heimin Shinbun*, and crushed the anarchist movement after its members took part in the High Treason Incident of 1911, a plot to assassinate the Meiji Emperor. The anarchist plot to assassinate the Meiji Emperor and dissolve the *kokutai*, however, frightened Japanese leaders and prompted them to expand the range of police activities. They created the Thought Police (*Tokko*), a civilian counterpart to the military police (*Kempei*), to continue the suppression of "dangerous thoughts" and political crimes. The Thought Police's mandate became the suppression of anyone who might in any way upset the social order or the political status of members of the conservative elite.

Thus, through a fusion of preventive and repressive measures, the state ably contained the social troubles that emerged at the turn of the century. The problem of controlling unrest in society, however, assumed larger proportions after World War I.

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed look at the use of social policy to prevent social tensions, see Kenneth B. Pyle, "Advantages of Followership: German Economics and Japanese Bureaucrats, 1890-1925," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 1:1 (1974), 127-164, and "The Technology of Japanese Nationalism: The Local Improvement Movement, 1900-1918," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Nov., 1973), 51-65.

The economic and social impacts of the First World War and the importation of such heterodox ideologies as Wilsonian democracy and communism deepened elite fears of a revolutionary potential emerging from Japanese society.

Though World War I proved to be an economic boon for Japan, which took over new markets vacated by the European powers, high rates of inflation led to an explosion of social unrest. Successive increases in the price of rice triggered the August 1918 rice riots that involved over 1 million persons throughout Japan. The riots, which had to be quelled by force, focused the attention of the Japanese elites on the revolutionary potential of the masses. This was the first time the general population had become active on a national scale, and Japanese leaders were likely concerned about what would happen if politically motivated radicals mobilized the masses for a political goal. The trepidation of the elites is captured in letters sent between Yamagata Aritomo and nationalist journalist Tokutomi Soho. Yamagata complained that the difficulties in society caused by price hikes “will ferment chaos from dangerous thoughts,” to which Tokutomi replied:

The rise in prices and the importation of anarchism fan each other and will give rise to social revolution... You cannot imagine how much the thinking and ideals of the young today are confused... Please destroy this letter.<sup>11</sup>

The 1917 Russian Revolution’s promotion of international communism plus the subsequent arrival of Wilsonian democratic ideals of national self-determination, power to the people, and liberalism represented additional challenges to the conservative elite. On the one hand, communism, with its advocacy of destroying both the *kokutai* and the private property system, challenged the very foundations of elite power. The formation

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Michael Lewis, *Rioters and Citizens: Mass Protest in Imperial Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p. 82.

of the Communist Party in 1922 thus struck fear into the hearts of Japanese leaders. Nonetheless, repressive police measures contained the latent communist threat to the *kokutai*; the Communist Party voluntarily disbanded in 1924.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Wilsonian democratic ideals of liberalism and national self-determination helped strengthen the universal manhood suffrage movement, whose demonstrations sometimes turned violent. The force of the movement convinced a reluctant bureaucratic elite of the inevitability of universal manhood suffrage. However, influential bureaucrats like Makino Nobuaki feared its consequences to the political system. In 1924, Makino wrote a memorandum that articulated the fear that “the enactment of universal suffrage would inject class warfare into the very heart of the political system and cause the destruction of social order.” To forestall such an eventuality, Makino urged the bureaucratic elites to “‘make universal suffrage a Japanese-style universal suffrage’ based not on concepts of equality and freedom but on loyalty and obligation.”<sup>13</sup> Taken together, both the suffrage movement and the short-lived creation of the Communist Party added to the sense of crisis among Japan’s conservative elite.

The aftermath of the highly destructive Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, of which the ensuing fires took over 100,000 lives in Tokyo and Yokohama, further fed into this sense of crisis. Rumors of Koreans poisoning the wells in the Tokyo area incited vigilante action that led to the massacre of thousands of Koreans. As the survivors were still clearing up the wreckage caused by the earthquake, an attempted assassination of the Crown Prince sent shock waves through the political elite. Namba Taisuke, the would-

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<sup>12</sup> Doctrinal and factional disputes among the communists were also factors. See George M. Beckmann and Okubo Genji, *The Japanese Communist Party: 1922-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969) pp. 55-78.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth B. Pyle, “State and Society in the Interwar Years,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Summer, 1977), p. 427

be assassin and son of a Diet member, was sentenced to death. Upon hearing the sentence, “Namba shouted three banzais: to the proletariat and Communist Party of Japan, to Russian socialism and the Soviet Republic, and to the Communist International.”<sup>14</sup> Though a fear of social unrest had already been visible among conservative circles, the actions by a volatile public in the aftermath of the earthquake, combined with Namba’s attempt on Hirohito’s life, intensified fears of both the communist party and social unrest in general.

Japanese scholar Maruyama Masao contends that that communism was never as potent a threat as the conservative elite perceived it to be.<sup>15</sup> The same can be said of other forms of social unrest. However, this does not mitigate the fact that members of the ruling elite both perceived a threat to the foundations of its power and were fearful of it. By the mid-1920s conservative circles caught a glimpse of the specter of social revolution in Japan, and promoted a two-pronged response to prevent such an occurrence: while sponsoring measures to bring the masses into politics and build loyalty to the state, they concurrently enacted repressive measures to control the thoughts of the populace. The former was accomplished through the extension of suffrage to all males in 1925; the latter was achieved through the passage of the Peace Preservation Law of 1925, which outlawed any attempts to change the government. The key ideas of the Peace Preservation Law were delineated in Article 1.

Anyone who organises an association with the objective of changing the *kokutai* or denying the private property system, or who joins such an association with full knowledge of its objectives, shall be liable to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a term not exceeding ten years.

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<sup>14</sup> Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, (New York: Perennial, 2001) p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> Maruyama Masao, “The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism,” *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 76.

Any attempt to commit the crime in the proceeding clause will be punished.<sup>16</sup>

Within the new law, communists and socialists, both who espoused ideologies geared towards changing the *kokutai* and the private property system, were subject to arrest and punishment.

In short, the conservative ruling elite responded to the perceived crisis of social unrest by attempting to achieve greater power and legitimacy. The power wielded by the government to suppress rival groups dramatically increased with the passage of the Peace Preservation Law of 1925, which was revised in 1928 to increase the maximum penalty from ten years imprisonment to life imprisonment or death. It allowed the elites to protect their positions within the political order. At the same time, by partially bringing the masses into politics, the extension of suffrage provided the government legitimacy to rule and ensured that the Peace Preservation legislation could be invoked without causing too much societal discord.

The Thought Police was charged with enforcing the Peace Preservation legislation. With the backing of the new law, the police became intrusive, repressive, and determined to root out the sources of political discontent in society. Through the late 1920s and 1930s, the Thought Police arrested and prosecuted thousands of suspected communists, socialists, anarchists, and any others who were identified as a threat to the political order; and it employed a variety of physically and psychologically brutal methods, including *tenko*, or forced ideological conversions,<sup>17</sup> to remove leftist influences from the body

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<sup>16</sup> Taken from Elise K. Tipton, *The Japanese Police State: The Tokko in Interwar Japan*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> *Tenko* refers to an ideological conversion under the coercion of state, society, or police power. The means of this coercion, explains Tsurumi Kazuko, includes both "direct and indirect violence. Arrest by the police, torture, court trial, imprisonment, and death belong to the former; job discrimination, praise or denunciation through mass communication media, and social pressure of various kinds belong to the latter." This was the main method the Thought Police used to suppress leftist ideologies. See Tsurumi

politic. The combination of the arrests and *tenko* hamstrung the communist party from attaining any influence in Japanese politics. However, the sheer number of arrests, probations, and prosecutions of suspected criminals convinced government leaders of a communist infiltration to the highest reaches of government. The specter of revolution lurked in the minds of many conservative leaders, and would have a strong impact on Japanese politics during the trials of World War II.

### **The Wartime Specter of Revolution**

The wartime specter of revolution emerged, ironically, as a result of measures taken to facilitate both the war effort in China and Japan's bid for autarky. Arisawa Hiromi, Ryu Shintaro, and other intellectuals in Konoe Fumimaro's brain trust, the Showa Research Organization (SRA), were dissatisfied with traditional capitalist economic policies. They feared that clashes among interest groups – mainly political parties, unions, and capitalists – would weaken Japan and hinder the war effort. Hence, Arisawa, Ryu, and others began research on an economic “new order” in 1938. This research culminated in two documents that were heavily influenced by both totalitarianism and Marxist thought. Ryu's book, *Nihon Keizai no Saihensei* (*The Reorganization of the Japanese Economy*) and the SRA document, entitled “Nihon Keizai Saihensei Shian” (Plan for the Reorganization of the Japanese Economy), both argued for broader state control over the economy and a shift from “profit orientation” to

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Kazuko, *Social Change and the Individual: Japan Before and After Defeat in World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) p. 37. The first instance of *tenko* occurred in 1933, when two Communist Party leaders, Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika, announced their ideological conversions and denunciations of communism. It was gradually institutionalized to also facilitate the reintroduction of past thought offenders into society and concurrently remove any stigma incurred during imprisonment.

“production orientation.”<sup>18</sup> This entailed heavy adjustments to capitalism “through the separation of capital ownership and industrial management, a transformation of economic ethics, a tightly organized economic structure based on cartels, and comprehensive economic planning.”<sup>19</sup>

The SRA proposal and Ryu’s book influenced reform bureaucrats in the Cabinet Planning Board (CPB), a wartime agency created in 1937 to increase state control over economic planning, to draft a “General Plan for the Establishment of the Economic New Structure” in September 1940. The “General Plan” echoed the SRA proposal in its advocacy of bringing industry into close cooperation with the state. Reform bureaucrats geared the plan, which would partially nationalize industry, towards the implementation of state-controlled rapid industrialization that would both support the war effort and mitigate the effects of the Allied powers’ boycott on Japanese goods. Although the CPB plan was applauded by reform bureaucrats, intellectuals, and members of the military’s *Tosei-ha* (Control Faction), which aimed to create a “national defense state,” the business elite and a group of right wing politicians characterized it as “Red” (*aka* – communist oriented) and strongly opposed its implementation.

By July 1941, the Thought Police caught wind of the CPB’s plans. They responded by employing the peace preservation legislation to purge seventeen CPB reform bureaucrats, accusing them of using the exigencies of the war to promote “Bolshevik polices” that would turn Japan into a socialist state.<sup>20</sup> Why the so-called Cabinet Planning Board Incident occurred is still unknown. It could have been a response by

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<sup>18</sup> Bai Gao, “Arisawa Hiromi and His Theory for a Managed Economy,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1994) pp. 128-29.

<sup>19</sup> Miles Fletcher, “Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Showa Japan,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Nov., 1979), p. 57.

<sup>20</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*, pp. 150-152

either (1) the business elites to prevent the nationalization of industries to aid the war effort and to protect their private property rights, (2) the army to remove reform bureaucrats that were pessimistic about the war effort, or (3) the Thought Police to purge reform bureaucrats that were supposedly promoting communist-influenced policies. Whatever the cause, the incident served to spark criticisms and fears of an existing Red threat to the nation.

Hard on the heels of the Cabinet Planning Board Incident came the arrest Ozaki Hotsumi, a respected journalist and member of Konoe Fumimaro's Showa Research Organization, Richard Sorge, a German journalist and member of the Nazi party, and others in what the government characterized as "a Red spy ring under the orders of Comintern headquarters."<sup>21</sup> Unlike the Cabinet Planning Board Incident, Sorge's spy ring actually engaged in seditious activities. For eight years, Ozaki and Sorge transmitted sensitive information to the Soviet Union, the most important being a 1941 message notifying the Soviet Union that it was safe from a Japanese attack. The Japanese secret service, which had intercepted many of the messages, arrested Sorge and Ozaki in October 1941 and hanged both for lese majesty in 1944.

Over time – especially after the outbreak of the Pacific War – Japanese leaders' perceptions of internal insecurity grew to such an extent that they created what Janice Matsumura describes as a self-perpetuating cycle of fear of threats to the nation:

Concerns about subversives took on the characteristics of a self-perpetuating cycle: anxieties concerning Communists spurred on police efforts to uncover hidden leftists and resulted in the purported discovery of conspiracies which, in turn, substantiated and intensified fears of a growing threat to the nation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *An Instance of Treason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 185.

<sup>22</sup> Janice Matsumura, "Internal Security in Wartime Japan (1937-45) and the Creation of Internal Insecurity," *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 31, Dec., 1996, p. 407.

Since this growing feeling of insecurity, epitomized by the Sorge spy ring, spurred the police on to uncover more leftists and threats to the nation, methods were changed to ensure that leftist threats would be found. Whether they actually existed was immaterial. An archetypal example of indiscriminate arrests of innocents occurred with the Yokohama Incident.

The Yokohama Incident, which began in 1942 with the arrest of journalist Hosokawa Karoku for publishing purportedly pro-Communist articles, lasted to the end of the war in 1945 and led to the arrest of dozens of journalists and political thinkers in Japan under trumped up charges. The murky details surrounding the interrogations of those detained reveal it as a setup. Most of those falsely arrested for spying, attempting to restore the decimated communist party, and spreading leftist propaganda signed confessions after being physically and psychologically tormented. Officers “drew up charges which were based on prevailing official hypotheses of Communist activity and simply tortured those arrested into agreeing to the charges.”<sup>23</sup>

The Yokohama Incident involved the pointless persecution of political groups and people that were considered security risks during Japan’s time of crisis and insecurity. As such, it is similar to the 1950s communist witch-hunts pursued in the United States by Senator McCarthy. Though the communist party had been all but destroyed in the 1930s, Japan’s governmental officials and members of the political elite were still reaching the conclusion that a communist fifth column was attempting to incite social revolution and destroy the *kokutai* from within. This near single-minded concern with communists and other subversives became more acute after the defeat at Midway

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 406. For an in depth look at the Yokohama Incident, see Janice Matsumura, *More than a Momentary Nightmare: The Yokohama Incident and Wartime Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Series, 1998).

revealed the turning tides of Japan's war against the West. The Tojo administration was so concerned about the possibility of an internal security risk obstructing the prosecution of the war that it issued the following statement in a secret cabinet meeting on 7 July 1942:

In our country communist agents in conservative guise (*akamigi*) continue to skillfully use lawful tactics to infiltrate and secretly maneuver within different organizations and groups... Particularly, most recently they have infiltrated government offices, self-governing bodies, schools, and other public organizations; and some [communists] are trying to lead the state towards communism from within (*chubu yori kore wo kyosanshugiteki hoko ni michibikanto saku seru mono aru*).<sup>24</sup>

Since the Tojo cabinet operated under the assumption that former thought control offenders formed the core of this group, it passed a measure in July 1942 that prohibited former offenders of the thought control laws – which included the Public Peace Law of 1900, the Peace Preservation Law, and other laws concerning intellectual, literary, and political activities – from attaining employment in public office.<sup>25</sup>

In a 1 February 1943 address to the Imperial Diet, Tojo again expressed his fear of a possible revolution from within:

I am sure of victory in this war. I never think about defeat. Defeat can only come in two ways. One is if our imperial army and navy are defeated. Of this I have no fear. The other is if our country breaks from within. To counter that danger, we shall act thoroughly to stop any speech or action which might harm our internal unity.<sup>26</sup>

Such fears did not emerge in a vacuum. In addition to being informed of the aforementioned incidents, the Tojo cabinet received numerous reports from the Home Ministry that outlined imminent threats to Japan's wartime industries and the *kokutai* itself. According to secret reports of the police chiefs, communist activity in Japan

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Awaysa Kentaro, "Chian ijiho jidai no ichi danmen" *Nihonshi Kenkyu*, No. 166, (August 1976) p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Awaysa Kentaro, "Chian ijiho," p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Ben-Ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) p.12.

aimed at obstructing the war effort and using the exigencies of the war to set off civil war. To accomplish these aims, communists would attempt to subvert the masses and sabotage war production.<sup>27</sup> These fears were outlined in a 1943 report on peace preservation measures:

...the infiltration of Japanese, Communist, and Independence elements, by gradually insinuating themselves into various legitimate fields and by taking advantage of the dissatisfaction and discontent of the working masses, will strive to arouse antiwar and antimilitary sentiments... and thus gain their subversive ends in one stroke. This is a matter which requires the utmost vigilance. Also some circles of the reform camp are cooperating consciously or unconsciously with the left-wing groups or are carrying out strenuous activities to educate the working classes to socialist or caste ideas... To be watched especially closely is the infiltration of left-wing elements... disguised as other groups.<sup>28</sup>

Similar to the 1943 report, in January 1944 a police chief's conference also dealt with fears of subversive activity. The "Explanation on the State of Public Peace," which police officials presented at the conference, used the Yokohama Incident as its paradigm for assessing domestic security.<sup>29</sup> The "Explanation on the State of Public Peace" not only used the bogus incident to confirm the existence of leftist elements, it also stated that communists were actively attempting to organize and promote domestic upheaval and rebellion.

In the course of the present year, with the deteriorating military and domestic situation, the Communist movement has progressed and gone from a preparatory stage to a stage of active resistance. That is, the Communists are trying to organize their scattered groups into an illegal, radical vanguard organization. In the meantime, they have formulated a plan to encourage popular discontent by drawing attention to those problems which, under the present strained domestic situation, are directly affecting the living conditions of the people. They are attempting to prompt outbursts of this discontent in every sector of society.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bureau of Police Affairs, quoted in U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, *Effects of Strategic Bombing on Japanese Morale*, p. 233.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 233-34.

<sup>29</sup> Janice Matsumura, "Internal Security," p. 410.

<sup>30</sup> Excerpt from the "Explanation on the State of Public Peace," quoted in Janice Matsumura, "Internal Security," p. 410.

In short, police officials warned that popular discontent could be mobilized against the *kokutai* – something the conservative ruling elite had attempted to forestall since the Meiji Restoration. This discontent, which grew in severity towards the end of the war, existed throughout Japan and emerged from a variety of sources. Wartime quotas on food rations represented one major grievance amongst both rural and urban populations. Dwindling food rations since early in the war led to starvation and triggered a variety of antiwar public graffiti and anti-establishment statements that decried the food situation.<sup>31</sup> By 1943, this discontent was visible to government officials and citizens alike. Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, a liberal journalist-critic, noted that a food famine could possibly spark off revolution. He wrote the following in a 27 May 1943 diary entry:

The Russian Revolution came because of a food famine. This is also true of the First World War in Germany. Is there any assurance that if the same fate came to Japan, riots would not occur? In any case, revolutionary changes will not be avoided.<sup>32</sup>

By 1945, owing to the escalation of Japan's food crisis and famine conditions that affected soldiers and citizens alike,<sup>33</sup> such a statement would have seemed prophetic to Japan's wartime ruling elite.

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<sup>31</sup> Examples of public scribbles that decried the food situation include the following: "No rice. End the war" (June 1942); and "How long will the Great East Asian War last? Three and a half years without food. One after another, starvation... All the strong ones have perished" (1943). Public statements – that hinted at class antagonism – include the following: "Since food is no problem for the ministers' wives, they are fat. The great mass of people don't have enough food, and their faces are sallow." In John W. Dower, *Japan in War and Peace*, p. 125, 128, 137.

<sup>32</sup> Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, *A Diary of Darkness: The Wartime Diary of Kiyosawa Kiyoshi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> This food crisis even affected the army, as the calorie intake of the average soldier dropped from 2117 kilocalories in July 1944 to a meager 1355 kilocalories in June 1945. See Torii Tami, *Showa 20 Nen: Dai Ichi Bu no 9, Kokuryoku no Genjo to Minshin no Doko* (Tokyo: Soshisha, 2001) pp. 191-192; 195. It has been estimated that people with low activity levels should have a daily intake of between 1940 kilocalories (for women) and 2550 kilocalories (for men). However, it must be noted that the average Japanese person was highly active during the war. Hence, their daily intake should have been substantially higher.

With such famine conditions came an obsession with food among Japanese civilians and military men. For an extended analysis of the food obsession, see Torii Tami, *Showa 20 Nen, (9)* p. 145-152; 188-189.

Popular discontent resulted from a variety of other grievances and resentments that existed among the rural and urban populations. Those living in rural areas resented both quotas on resources and their responsibility to provide food and shelter for the 2.4 million soldiers mobilized for the defense of the homeland. Wartime controls also led to worker agitation in the urban areas, particularly among conscripted foreign workers that were forced to do the most tedious jobs in a dangerous wartime setting of increasingly effective Allied bombing campaigns.<sup>34</sup>

The above groups, along with leftist figures, engaged in a variety of antiwar, antimilitary, and other anti-establishment activities by sending anonymous letters to newspapers, writing graffiti in public areas, making statements, singing songs and even writing poems that expressed their discontent with the status quo. The police became concerned with such activities, particularly with graffiti and public statements. While leftists wrote the majority of the public graffiti, with statements such as “Communist Party *banzai!*”, “Japanese Communist Party *banzai!*”, and other pro-communist statements the norm, many public statements by those without leftist sympathies even railed against the emperor and the *kokutai*.<sup>35</sup> An August 1945 report assembled by the Home Ministry’s National Police Agency (*Keihokyoku*) stated that the content of such blasphemous statements “are progressively getting worse.” Included in the report were the following examples of public writings: “I curse the emperor, who brought the tragedy of war upon the people”; “I deplore how the emperor lives an idle and indolent life, outside the orbit of the war”; and “after defeat, [since his] war responsibility is obvious,

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<sup>34</sup> John W. Dower, *Japan in War and Peace*, (New York: New Press, 1993) pp. 112-114.

<sup>35</sup> For a list of public scribblings between December 1941 and March 1944, see *Ibid.* pp. 124-128.

the emperor should bear responsibility for war!”<sup>36</sup> Other reports depict how the emperor was “belittled as a fool (*baka*), stupid fool (*bakayaro*), and big stupid fool (*daibakayaro*) – but also as a spoiled child (*bochan*), figurehead (*kazarimono*), good-for-nothing (*gokutsubushi*), icon (*guzo*), and ‘an expensive rubber stamp’ (*keihi no kakaru ingyō*).”<sup>37</sup> In addition, spur-of-the-moment flare-ups from the rural populace resulted in the defilement of the emperor’s portrait and even threats on his person. As John W. Dower demonstrates, cries to kill the emperor were not infrequent. Ten laborers were arrested for their lengthy discussion of the emperor that resulted in a decision that the farmers and workers should throw the emperor into the Siberian snow. A drunken farmer expressed an interest in shooting the emperor; a miner, also drunk, uttered an intention to beat the emperor to death.<sup>38</sup>

Thought Police reports reveal that the numbers of these anti-establishment incidents increased yearly. The number of cases actually prosecuted jumped from 173 in the 1942-43 fiscal year to 325 cases in the 1944-45 fiscal year.<sup>39</sup> However, since many of the culprits remained anonymous, the actual number of incidents was likely much higher, leading a police report in 1945 to state the following:

Recent rumors, scribblings and [other] manifestations are numerically increasing... They say that the Japanese war leaders, or the leading circles, are responsible for the decisive battle against Japan proper, for intensified air raids, shortage of foodstuff, acute inflation, etc., all of which have made people’s lives hard. This indignation against the ruling class was shown in criticisms of military strategy and misrepresentation of the attitude of military circles. Others speak ill of government measures and government communiqués. They explicitly assume a hostile attitude towards government circles. Some dare to speak of class antagonism.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Yoshida Yutaka, *Showa Tenno no Shusenshi*, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1992) pp. 28-29.

<sup>37</sup> John W. Dower, *Japan in War and Peace* p. 140.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 142-143.

<sup>39</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Effects of Strategic Bombing on Japanese Morale*, p. 249.

<sup>40</sup> The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Effects of Strategic Bombing on Japanese Morale*, p. 113; 249.

Members of the conservative elite were privy to these and other reports of the worsening domestic situation. The Home Minister, in addition to receiving reports from the Thought Police, had a secret line of communication with the commanding officer of the military police; Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Kido Koichi, the Emperor's most trusted advisor, also had frequent contact with those responsible for maintaining law and order, including the commanding officer of the military police and the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police (*Keishi Sokan*).<sup>41</sup> The combination of knowledge of the police reports, informal contacts with the military police, and the above-mentioned incidents led Japan's wartime ruling elite to view both the budding antiwar and antimilitary atmosphere and the incidents of lese majesty as growing threats to the foundations of their power. Whether these incidents actually occurred (the Sorge spy ring and the many public scribblings) or were imagined (the Yokohama Incident) makes no difference. By 1945, many elites had come to the conclusion that the masses were disillusioned enough to be mobilized for communist or revolutionary purposes. In addition, they feared that the strain of defeat in the Pacific War could create the conditions necessary for a successful leftist revolution. In the eyes of many key figures, the specter of revolution had become both very real and very frightening.



The Yoshida Anti-War Group (*YOHANSEN*), a loose coalition of Japanese that represented a microcosm of the conservative political elite, first officially raised the specter of a leftist revolution in early 1945. The nominal head of *YOHANSEN* was Yoshida Shigeru, a former ambassador to London. He formed the group in 1942, and it gradually took on court officials, military leaders, politicians, influential journalists, and

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<sup>41</sup> Yoshida Yutaka, *Showa Tenno no Shusenshi*, p. 29.

prominent industrialists that opposed the war for various reasons. Even though associations with the Yoshida Anti-War Group reached across the spectrum of the conservative political elite, the core was relatively small, made up of the following six individuals: Yoshida, journalist Iwabuchi Tatsuo, businessman and former Finance Ministry bureaucrat Ueda Shunkichi, former Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, Major General Obata Toshishiro, and General Mazaki Jinzaburo.<sup>42</sup>

Though the group desired an expedient end to the war, their motives were deeply conservative in character. The Yoshida Anti-War Group wanted to end the war mainly to protect the *kokutai* from a revolutionary upheaval at home. The basis of their fears of revolutionary upheaval rested in a conspiracy theory to which Yoshida and other members of the anti-war group subscribed. In essence, the theory held that many top militarists in the military's *Tosei-ha* (Control Faction) were actually secret communists who were deliberately using the war crisis to promote state control over the economy and turn Japan communist from within.<sup>43</sup> However, since the war had released "revolutionary tendencies" both at home and abroad that "threatened the very fabric of the traditional Japanese state," it was necessary to end the war and establish peace in as expedient a manner as possible. To do so required removing the *Tosei-ha* from power. The only group that stood a chance of ousting the *Tosei-ha*, however, was the *Kodo-ha* (Imperial Way Faction), a faction in the military that had been removed from power in

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<sup>42</sup> John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 235. To see a brief list and biographies of the main members of *YOHANSEN*, see Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, pp. 231-234. Also in Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku* (Historical records of the war's end), (Tokyo: Shinbun Gekkansha, Showa 27 [1952]), pp. 117-131.

<sup>43</sup> Ueda Shunkichi felt that Japan's economic policies were particularly dangerous. He thought that the army's centralized economic policies were "communist economic policies" formulated by a group that studied under communist teachers in Europe. Ueda stated that if they were fully carried out, "in the end Japan will not be able to help but turn communist," in Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku*, pp. 125-126.

1936 after the abortive February 26 Incident. In a word, it was imperative that the discredited *Kodo-ha* oust the *Tosei-ha* from power and sue for peace as soon as possible to maintain the very foundation of the traditional Japanese state.<sup>44</sup>

*YOHANSEN* involved itself in various maneuvers to end the war; some were ill considered while others were better thought-out. The first of the underdeveloped schemes occurred in 1942 when Yoshida convinced Konoe to go to Switzerland, ostensibly to observe the war in the European theater but in reality to sound out peace overtures to the Allied powers. After this plan petered out, *YOHANSEN* shifted gears and began to form plans that would insert one of its members into the premiership. Both General Ugaki in 1942 and Admiral Kobayashi in 1944 were considered prime candidates to take the premiership and bring about the end of the war, but both ended in failure. The scheme revolving around General Ugaki came to an end with Ugaki's refusal to either return to active duty or purge the *Tosei-ha* once he gained power; the plan to instate Admiral Kobayashi also died out once Konoe neglected to recommend him as Tojo's successor in July 1944. General Koiso Kuniaki was chosen instead.<sup>45</sup>

The strongest of the *YOHANSEN* maneuvers to end the war came with a direct appeal by Konoe to the Emperor on 14 February 1945. This appeal to the Emperor raised the specter of revolution as an important factor in determining national policy and attempted to put the decision to end the war in the Emperor's lap. In addition, the memorial represented the definitive version of the fear of a communist threat to the *kokutai*.

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<sup>44</sup> John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, pp. 235-237

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 252-255.

Scholars are unclear on when Konoe began to fear social revolution. Any speculation is complicated by the very fact that Konoe, who was at the top of the elite heap and close to the Emperor, had been a student of the famed Marxist theoretician Kawakami Hajime. In fact, Konoe had surrounded himself with SRA intellectuals who were also heavily influenced by Marxism. And the policies these handpicked SRA intellectuals helped initiate – which promoted greater state control over the economy – ironically fed the flames of Konoe’s fear. Complications aside, it is likely that Konoe began to fear possible social upheaval as early as 1941, after Ozaki Hotsumi was arrested in connection with the Sorge spy ring. Following his arrest, Ozaki commented:

My hair has gone white from the struggle to carry on my hidden activities under false pretences. But my campaign to make “Red” Japan has succeeded. Japan is plunged in the Great War, the country is in chaos and revolution is just round the corner. Nine-tenths of my work is done and my only regret is that I shall not live to see its completion.

Upon hearing this, Konoe is said to have shuddered.<sup>46</sup>

By late 1943, after military defeats pushed the Tojo cabinet to advocate a more centralized wartime economy, Konoe became more tuned in to the possibility of communist influence penetrating the highest reaches of government. In particular, he thought that the Tojo administration’s “reform plan” for increased economic centralization should be seen in the context of a continuing scheme promoted by a “certain group” (*Tosei-ha*) within the army since the Manchurian Incident.<sup>47</sup> Though the “reform plan” was originally prepared to supplement a five-year plan to increase production and create a “high level defense-production state,” Konoe argued in a letter to

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<sup>46</sup> Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Japan and Her Destiny: My Struggle for Peace* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), p. 245.

<sup>47</sup> Oka Yoshitake, *Konoe Fumimaro: A Political Biography*, (New York: Madison Books, 1992), p. 200; John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, p. 257.

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As the war progressed, Konoe's anxiety about a possible communist revolution heightened. In May 1944, he revealed to Hosokawa Morisada, a young noble and collector of information for *YOHANSEN*, various reports written by a Soviet attaché that complained of such an extreme form of communism emerging in Japan that the Soviet

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<sup>46</sup> Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Japan and Her Destiny: My Struggle for Peace* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), p. 245.

<sup>47</sup> Oka Yoshitake, *Konoe Fumimaro: A Political Biography*, (New York: Madison Books, 1992), p. 200; John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, p. 257.

<sup>48</sup> John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, p. 257.

<sup>49</sup> Oka Yoshitake, *Konoe Fumimaro*, pp. 200-01; John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, p. 257-58.

Union should be wary. The attaché emphasized both that “the trend in Japan is going towards communism” and that “We [the Soviet Union] are going to have to defend ourselves from Japanese communism.”<sup>50</sup>

The following month, at a meeting with police chief Hata Shigenori, Konoe was told that while Japan had no communist party, the deterioration of the wartime economy provided fertile ground for communist movements. According to Hata, the situation was akin to a “stack of hay, ready to burst into flame at the touch of a match.”<sup>51</sup> With the elites in the police force – whose mandate was to deal with radical elements – issuing such accusations, it is no wonder that men like Konoe viewed the country as ridden with communists and subversives.

Again in July 1944, Konoe restated his fear of a looming leftist threat in yet another letter to Kido. In the letter, written as the Tojo cabinet was about to fall, he stated,

Leftwing elements are lying low all over, waiting to seize the opportunity of impending defeat to incite revolution. Added to this, the majority of those who as so-called right-wingers call for unyielding prosecution of the war and annihilation of the United States and Great Britain are left-wing apostates, and we must weigh their true intentions. It is difficult to imagine what sort of schemes these groups have for taking advantage of the confusion.<sup>52</sup>

Konoe continued with this line of thought during the meeting to choose Tojo’s successor:

Going to extremes, our country today seems to be progressing towards leftist revolution. This trend can be seen in all the current conditions. Of course defeat is dreadful, but leftist revolution is as frightening, or perhaps even more frightening, than losing the war. Defeat is temporary and can be dealt with [to our advantage], but if a leftist revolution occurs, the *kokutai* and everything will be swept away. Consequently, the most extreme attention concerning leftist revolution is necessary. Leftists are not only those who openly campaign or protest. There are also many leftists who pretend to be rightist military men or government officials. There are also

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Oka Yoshitake, *Konoe Fumimaro*, p. 201.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in John W. Dower, “Sensational Rumors, Seditious Graffiti, and the Nightmares of the Thought Police,” *Japan in War and Peace*, p. 109.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, p. 258.

extremely many people who, although they have no intention to, are completely Red in their actions. We absolutely need someone [as prime minister] who will suppress this [*swing an axe against this*].

In short, Konoe wanted to instate a Prime Minister who could both end the war and contain the leftist threat to the *kokutai* to ensure that Japan would not turn Red. Many present at the meeting, including Kido and former Prime Ministers Hiranuma Kiichiro and Wakatsuki Reijiro, among others, agreed with Konoe's analysis.<sup>53</sup>

As his fears of an imminent revolutionary threat mounted, Konoe drew increasingly close to *YOHANSEN*, so much so that in February 1945 he and Yoshida prepared a memorial to present to the Emperor that outlined this peril to the *kokutai*. Both Yoshida and Konoe calculated that a strong appeal directly to the Throne might move the Emperor enough to quit the war before the occurrence of social revolution. This appeal, which became known as the Konoe Memorial to the Throne, mirrored reports Konoe had obtained from police officials like Hata, and explained in detail that Japan was on the verge of a leftist revolution. The basic argument put forth in the memorial, given on 14 February 1945, is as follows:

Regrettably, defeat [in the present war] is already inevitable... according to the principles of maintaining the *kokutai* (national polity), we should not be as concerned with defeat itself as with a communist revolution that would accompany defeat... I feel that at the present time, both conditions internal and external to Japan are rapidly progressing towards a communist revolution.

Konoe's Memorial discussed the threat in greater detail, the salient facets outlined below:

It is apparent that there is already a significant danger that the Soviet Union will interfere in our domestic affairs... and I feel that if one looks at the domestic situation, one can see that day by day all the conditions necessary to achieve a communist revolution are being prepared. Namely, there is impoverishment, an increase in the voice of labor, a rise in hostility towards America and England being expressed alongside a friendly attitude towards the Soviet Union. There are also reformist movements of a ring in the military elite, a movement of "new bureaucrats" that have

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<sup>53</sup> Konoe Fumimaro, *Konoe Nikki*, (Tokyo: Kyodo Tsushinsha, 1968) pp. 92-93.

jumped on the military bandwagon, and leftist elements that secretly attempt to pull the strings from behind the scenes.

It is clear that members of the military had a conscious plan to both instigate the Manchurian and China Incidents, and to expand them into the Great East Asian War... Although the ultimate aim of this military group's reform theory is not communist revolution, groups of bureaucrats and interested persons consciously intend on dragging it towards a communist revolution.<sup>54</sup>

In essence, Konoe discussed two major components of a grand communist conspiracy: International and domestic. Internationally, the Soviet Union was making great gains, and her Japanese communist allies threatened to intervene in Japan's internal affairs and incite a communist uprising against the ruling elite. Domestically, a communist element among Japan's right-wing military, bureaucratic, and political leaders was using the war to both enact reform and pull the strings of a disillusioned and poverty-stricken populace, inciting them to action. The combination of both the internal and external spheres made Japan ripe for a successful communist revolution and the consequent destruction of the emperor system. In short, both the international and domestic situations made revolution from both above and below a distinct possibility that, in the minds of the war termination clique, could undo the very fabric of Japanese society.

The concerns held by Konoe and Yoshida's Anti-War Group – that communist influences had penetrated the highest reaches of the military and bureaucracy – may seem like mere paranoia or even an ideological barb used as part of a power struggle among members of the political elite. Undoubtedly both are true to a certain extent. However, it must be realized that these fears of communist influences welling up within Japan had deep roots in the events of the 1930s and 1940s. The war in China brought

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<sup>54</sup> Konoe no Josobun [The Konoe Memorial to the Throne], in Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku*, pp. 195-98. See Appendix I for my full translation of the Konoe Memorial.

about rapid social, economic, intellectual, and institutional change in Japan. Intellectuals, reform bureaucrats, and members of the military had thrown their combined weight behind plans to radically restructure the economy and create a national defense state. As part of the restructuring of the economy, the state promoted mergers between massive corporations – such as a merger between Mitsui, Daiichi, Mitsubishi, and Daihaku – to advance extended control over industry. By 1943-44, it was plausible to see the acceleration of Tojo's plans for economic centralization and rationalization, both of which had Marxist roots, as the capstone of an effort to subvert the economic structure of the state from within. These facts, combined with the thousands of arrests of communist subversives and numerous police reports that described communist infiltration at the highest levels, created a genuine fear of an internal threat that could undo the very fabric of the Japanese state. The Konoe memorial both reflected and epitomized those fears.

Japanese historian Hata Ikuhiko contends that, if anything, Konoe's "wild conception (*toppi na hasso*) of the bolshevization of the military had the opposite effect" of hardening the Emperor's resolve to fight the war.<sup>55</sup> Yet since Hata neglects to explain why or how Konoe's appeal backfired, his statement can be no more than an assumption based on the ultimate failure of the plea to promptly end the war.

Contrary to Hata's assertion, the historical evidence indicates that Hirohito was initially intrigued by Konoe's assessment, for upon the completion of the memorial he invited Konoe to discuss his ideas in greater detail. Hirohito began by telling Konoe

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<sup>55</sup> Hata Ikuhiko, *Hirohito Tenno no Itutsu no Ketsudan*, (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1984) p. 52.

that he was shocked – he did not realize that communist influence had spread so far.<sup>56</sup>

Additionally, Hirohito maintained that Konoe's statement directly contradicted the views of the Imperial Headquarters, which felt that Japan had no choice but to continue the war.

He said,

Imperial Headquarters Chief of Staff Umezu gave a memorial to the Throne on [February] ninth... Your opinion and the opinion of the Imperial Headquarters are polar opposites. According to the Imperial Headquarters, American war policies aim to destroy Japan's *kokutai*; and they will not stop until Japan is completely burnt down (*nihon wo shodo ni shinakereba akitaranu mono de aru*), so we cannot think of making peace with America. On the contrary, because the Soviet Union has goodwill towards Japan, even if the main isles are burnt down, we must, with Soviet support, continue our war of resistance against America.<sup>57</sup>

Hirohito then requested Konoe's opinion on whether Japan should sue for peace. Konoe responded that Japan should accept the Allied war aims and surrender unconditionally.<sup>58</sup>

There is no alternative but to make peace with America. Even with unconditional surrender, I do not think that America would change the *kokutai* or get rid of the emperor system. Perhaps Japanese territory will shrink in half, but even then, if our citizens would be saved from the miserable havoc of war, the *kokutai* would be preserved, and the security of the Imperial House planned for, we should not be inclined to shun unconditional surrender...<sup>59</sup>

In short, surrender unconditionally and possibly save the *kokutai* and the emperor system; continue to fight and suffer the very real possibility that a domestic revolution would lead

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<sup>56</sup> Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku* (1952), p. 200. Though Hirohito stated that he was shocked, it is likely that he had been informed of Konoe's arguments through Kido, who had been aware of Konoe's views since 1943. Konoe also had additional indirect lines of communication to the Emperor. Former Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijiro explains that Konoe could indirectly inform the Emperor of his views through the Home Minister, and vice versa. See Wakatsuki Reijiro, *Kofuan Kaikoroku: Meiji, Taisho, Showa Seikai Hisshi* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1950) pp. 427-28. However, I am unaware of whether Konoe made use of this indirect communication route to the Emperor before February 1945.

<sup>57</sup> Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku: Volume 2* (Tokyo: Hokuyosha, 1977) p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> The unconditional surrender policy, first enunciated by Roosevelt at a conference in Casablanca in January 1943, became the Anglo-American war aim. The policy of unconditional surrender was created to ensure that the Anglo-American powers would be able to occupy and reform the fascist aggressor states. Occupation and reform would help guarantee that Germany, Japan and Italy would never again become a threat to Allied interests. Konoe felt that Japan had no choice but to accede to the Allied war aims and surrender unconditionally.

<sup>59</sup> Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku* (1952), p. 199.

to the eradication of both. The Emperor appears to have concurred with this assessment, for after listening to Konoe's response he stated, "I agree."<sup>60</sup> However, once Konoe emphasized the importance of using *Kodo-ha* Generals (either Ugaki or Mazaki) to both control the military and sue for peace, Hirohito fell silent – this has been viewed as an expression of his disapproval for using the same group that had attempted a coup d'état in 1936.<sup>61</sup> Eventually, however, he let it be known that the war would continue: "It would be difficult [to end the war] without first improving the military situation (*mo ichido senka wo agete kara de nai to hanashi ga muzukashi*)."<sup>62</sup> Hirohito thus remained loyal to Tojo's *Tosei-ha*; Konoe left the meeting despondent. Nonetheless, Konoe's appeal had an impact on the Emperor. Later that afternoon, Hirohito reaffirmed this newfound worry over the domestic situation in a comment to his aide-de-camp: "If we hold out in this war I'm certain of victory, but I worry whether the people will be able to endure."<sup>63</sup>



As we have seen, though he may have agreed with Konoe's assessment of a threat of domestic upheaval, Hirohito held a strong distaste for the medicine Konoe prescribed. This distaste was attributable to the fact that Konoe's memorial was an oblique attack on General Tojo Hideki's *Tosei-ha*.<sup>64</sup> Konoe, true to the *YOHANSEN* strategy,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>61</sup> John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, p. 265. While the Gaimusho account only indicates that Konoe recommended Ugaki and Mazaki, other accounts indicate that he also suggested that Generals Obata, Ishihara, and Kozuki would make good candidates to control the military and sue for peace. See Torii Tami, *Showa 20 Nen: Dai Ichi Bu no 2, Hokai no Kizashi* (Tokyo: Soshisha, 1986) p. 67.

<sup>62</sup> Fujita Hisanori, *Jijūcho no Kaiso* (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1987), p. 66. The dialogue Grand Chamberlain Fujita recorded also appears in toto in Nakao Yuji, *Showa Tenno Hatsugen Kiroku Shusei – Gekan* (Tokyo: Fuyo Shobo Shuppan, 2003) pp. 322-323.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Nakao Yuji, *Showa Tenno Hatsugen Kiroku – Gekan*, p. 323; also quoted in Hata Ikuhiko, *Hirohito Tenno*, p. 53. For a similar translation in English, see Edward J. Drea, *In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army*, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) p. 199.

<sup>64</sup> Takemae Eiji, *The Allied Occupation of Japan* (Formerly Titled *Inside GHQ: The Allied Occupation of Japan and its Legacy*) (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 221

recommended ending the war and saving the *kokutai* from social revolution through both a purge of *Tosei-ha* generals and the instatement of a *Kodo-ha* general to the premiership. However, owing to his enduring loyalty to Tojo and the *Tosei-ha* military outlook, Hirohito chose to side with then-Prime Minister Koiso Kuniaki. He disregarded Konoe's arguments and insisted on one more military success before suing for peace. In this way, Hirohito hoped to bring the Allied powers to the negotiating table and ensure the existence of the imperial institution after defeat.<sup>65</sup> In short, he gambled on foreign policy rather than domestic policy to save the *kokutai*.

Nonetheless, chances for military gains continually eluded Japan's grasp. By early June 1945, MacArthur's forces had captured Leyte and Luzon, retaken the Philippines, and virtually won the bloody battle for Okinawa. Total defeat in war, while not inevitable, seemed to be near at hand. This fact, in conjunction with a projected poor harvest for 1945 and an increasingly effective bombing campaign that diminished Japanese morale, increased the conservative elite's concern with domestic conditions. At the same time, Hirohito still accepted the approach to wartime strategy outlined by the military hardliners. That is, he viewed a military victory as a prerequisite to any negotiations for peace. This led him to formally sanction the military-drafted "Fundamental Policy to Be Followed Henceforth in the Conduct of War,"<sup>66</sup> on 8 June 1945.

The Fundamental Policy was a military position paper on the future prosecution of the war. It was submitted alongside two supporting policy documents, the "Estimate of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>66</sup> For an in depth description of the Fundamental Policy, see Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* pp. 92-102. In Japanese, see Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku: Volume 3*, pp. 19-64.

the World Situation” and “The Present State of National Power.”<sup>67</sup> Together, all three documents committed Japan to repel the Allied forces by any means available – instead of surrendering, Japan should be ready to fight to the finish, even if it led to the total extinction of the Japanese race. Yet, while submitted to buttress the Fundamental Policy, “The Present State of National Power” actually depicted the dire straits of Japan’s domestic situation. According to the position paper, Allied battle campaigns and bombing raids had disrupted both sea and land communications and war production. In addition, the food shortage had worsened, making it “increasingly difficult to meet the requirements of total war.” Dissatisfaction with the government and military was also mounting, leading the authors to write: “The people are losing confidence in their leaders and the gloomy omen of deterioration of public morale is present.”<sup>68</sup> In short, even while promoting the policy of fighting to the finish, the advocates of the Fundamental Policy recognized the existence of growing social discontent that could eventually lead to social disintegration or even a domestic attack on the *kokutai*.

The discussions over the Fundamental Policy left a strong impact on Privy Seal Kido Koichi regarding Japan’s internal conditions. The same day that the Emperor endorsed the Fundamental Policy, Kido recorded his unease over the prosecution of the war and the toll the Allied bombing campaign was taking on the country. He noted that the battle in Okinawa would likely “result in a miserable fiasco,” and that “The Present State of National Power” had convinced him that by the end of the year Japan would be unable to continue the war. More importantly, Kido worried about the effects strategic

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<sup>67</sup> Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan’s Decision to Surrender*, p. 94.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.* p. 94.

bombing was having on the country, and predicted that a shortage of food and supplies could lead to social upheaval.

The extreme shortage of provisions and foodstuffs that will sweep the country in the latter part of this year and thereafter – in light of the approaching chilly season – will cause serious unrest among the people at large. And, in consequence, the situation will be beyond salvation.<sup>69</sup>

Kido noted that the only alternative would be to begin peace negotiations. However, ironically, Kido desired to use the good offices of the Soviet Union – the very nation that Konoe thought was helping foment social revolution in Japan – to help negotiate an end to the war and save Japan from domestic turmoil that the government might be unable to control!<sup>70</sup> He immediately prepared a “Draft Plan for Controlling the Crisis Situation,” which was meant to be a countermeasure to the Fundamental Policy. Kido based this countermeasure on a naive hope that a negotiated peace through the Soviet Union would provide Japan added leverage in its dealings with the United States. In Kido’s mind, a negotiated solution would allow Japan to quit the war before the domestic situation got out of hand. However, the plan was quite vague in character. The only provisions Kido addressed were that Japan would (1) give up its leadership role and control over occupied territories, and (2) disarm to a minimum level required for national defense.<sup>71</sup> Regarding the specifics, Kido would let the experts fill in the blanks.

On June 9, Kido brought the plan to the Emperor. It is unknown whether Kido’s views of a domestic threat to the *kokutai* convinced the Emperor of the necessity to end the war. However, as Kido was the main advisor to the Throne, it is indubitable that his analysis carried much weight with Hirohito. Whatever the case, the Emperor stated that

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<sup>69</sup> Kido Koichi, *The Diary of Marquis Kido, 1931-45: Selected Translations into English*, (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, Inc., 1984), p. 434-35.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>71</sup> Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku* (1952), pp. 399-400; Butow, *Japan’s Decision to End the War*, p. 114.

he had been worried for some time about Japan's domestic situation, owing to the effects of both continued bombings that destroyed the defenses of most of Japan's cities and the forthcoming provisions crisis that would hit Japan hard in the coming fall. He was reportedly "deeply satisfied" with Kido's recommendations, and gave Kido permission to discuss the plan with other key figures in order to obtain their support.<sup>72</sup>

During the course of Kido's discussions with members of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War (Supreme War Council, also known as the Big Six), Japan's key decision-making group from 1944-45,<sup>73</sup> it became clear that Kido and Hirohito were not the only ones who worried about Japan's domestic situation. Navy Minister Yonai Mitsumasa and Prime Minister Suzuki Kantaro both agreed that Japan was in dire straits, with Suzuki even making the prescient remark that Japan would be defeated by August. Suzuki offered his full support for Kido's plan to end the war in order to preserve the *kokutai* and protect the Imperial Family.<sup>74</sup>

Even hardliner Army Minister Anami and other military leaders did not object to Kido's peace plan. However, they clearly stated that although they would allow Kido to pursue peace negotiations through the Soviet Union, the military would continue its policies regarding the decisive battle for the homeland.<sup>75</sup> Unconvinced of the utility of Kido's efforts but unwilling to impede any chance to exit the war on favorable terms, the military tolerated peace negotiations while focusing their efforts on a military solution that would bring the Allied powers to the negotiating table.

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<sup>72</sup> Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku* (1952), p. 401.

<sup>73</sup> Members of the Supreme Council, which was formed in August 1944, included the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Army and Navy Ministers and the Army and Navy Chiefs of Staff. Together, the members of the Supreme Council, Kido Koichi, and Hirohito represented the key figures in wartime Japan.

<sup>74</sup> Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku* (1952), p. 401.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

The support given to Kido's proposal – both nominal and real – added to growing concerns over the state of public morale, convinced Hirohito to call a meeting of the Big Six and Kido on 22 June 1945. The Emperor realized that the meeting two weeks prior had committed Japan to fight to the finish. However, a combination of Kido's concerns, the military position paper, and the ever-present police reports likely convinced him that a continuation of the war would create domestic disturbances that could endanger the Throne. Nonetheless, Hirohito still opened the meeting with the following ambiguous statement that both points to the domestic conditions as a motivation for war termination while at the same time confirming the preexisting policy of a decisive battle for the homeland: "Conditions internal and external to Japan grow tense and the war situation is very difficult, and will likely become more difficult as air raids intensify in the future. Though the decision made the other day at the meeting of the Supreme War Council can be left as is, I expect that all efforts be made to promptly terminate the war."<sup>76</sup> Despite its ambiguous nature – which likely results from his unwillingness to abandon efforts to save the *kokutai* through a military-centered foreign policy – it is apparent from the Emperor's statement that he had begun to worry about possible consequences of the worsening domestic situation and desired to do something about it. In fact, this desire to take positive action was so strong that when he encountered passive resistance from Army Chief of Staff Umezu Yoshijiro – who wanted to ensure that Japan was careful in

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<sup>76</sup> Nakao Yuji, *Showa Tenno Hatsugen Kiroku Shusei – Gekan*, p. 374. There remains a dispute about what the Emperor actually said in the June 22 meeting. Asada Sadao and others quote him as merely stating a desire, "that concrete plans to end the war, unhampered by existing policy, be speedily studied and efforts made to implement them." See Asada Sadao, "The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan's Decision to Surrender – A Reconsideration," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4, Nov. 1998, p. 500. However, Admiral Toyoda's November 1945 interview corroborates the fact that the Emperor cited the domestic situation as his motivation for bringing the war to a prompt conclusion. See United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government, 1946), Volume 2, p. 319. In the interview, however, Toyoda confused the date of the meeting. He listed it as occurring on June 26 instead of June 22.

its peace maneuvers – Hirohito said the following: “Of course it is necessary to be careful, but do not miss any opportunity [to promptly end the war].”<sup>77</sup>

At the end of the meeting, the key decision makers in Japan (the Big Six plus the Emperor and Kido) agreed to pursue peace negotiations through the Soviets. Nonetheless, “there was no consensus about what peace terms Japan might offer, much less accept.”<sup>78</sup> Thus began the first series of officially sanctioned, yet halfhearted, attempts to end the war.<sup>79</sup>

### **Feeble Peace Feelers**

Kido deliberately left vague his plan to negotiate an end to the war through the good offices of the Soviet Union. He had anticipated that policymakers would use it as a framework to create a more comprehensive peace plan. However, the Big Six never reached a consensus on the specifics of the initiative. Apart from a vague and ironic notion that Konoe – a virulent anticommunist who had been worried about Soviet influence in East Asia for over a decade – would be sent to Moscow in mid-July to sound out both the Soviet government’s demands in East Asia and its willingness to help

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<sup>77</sup> Kido Koichi, *Kido Koichi Nikki – Gekan* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1966) p. 1213.

<sup>78</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999) p. 102.

<sup>79</sup> Many scholars that deal with the historiography of the atomic bombings assert that Japanese peace initiatives began much earlier than June 1945. Specifically, Gar Alperovitz used MAGIC intercepts to illustrate that peace maneuvers began as early as July and August 1944, shortly after the fall of the Tojo administration. Alperovitz asserted the ‘peace feelers’ picked up pace after the fall of Germany in May 1945, and continued to the end of the war. See Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) pp. 23-30, 292-93, 295-97. While some MAGIC intercepts give the impression that the Japanese government desired peace from mid-1944, numerous statements from Japanese officials (and other MAGIC intercepts) directly contradict the idea that the Japanese government desired to officially open peace negotiations. The Japanese government officially launched negotiations with the Soviet Union in May 1945, but it was kept secret from the Emperor and the talks were centered on promoting an extension of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact. For an excellent in-depth discussion of Japanese ‘peace feelers,’ see Richard B. Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 86-116, 221-232.

negotiate a settlement with the United States and Great Britain, the Japanese government formulated no concrete proposals. Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori simply instructed the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow, Sato Naotake, to smooth the way for direct negotiations with Molotov and Stalin before the upcoming Potsdam Conference.

It would not have made any difference had Japan generated a concrete proposal to discuss with the Soviet Union. The Yalta Accord, which required Soviet involvement in the Pacific war against Japan, had promised the Soviet Union, upon entrance into the war, territorial gains and other concessions far beyond what Japan would have been willing or able to offer. Hence, Stalin was fully prepared to declare war on Japan – the date to commence such hostilities, in accordance with the agreements made at Yalta, was set for three months after the end of fighting in Europe. On 19 July 1945 Moscow refused to receive Konoe with the justification that the purpose of Konoe's delegation was "not specific."<sup>80</sup>

While still in the dark about the imminent Soviet declaration of war, Sato understood that the Soviet Union was uninterested in facilitating a negotiated peace – he had been warning Togo of the futility of peace measures through the Soviet Union since June 8.<sup>81</sup> Thus, for Sato the July 19 decision to refuse Japan's envoy came as no surprise. He felt that Japan had no choice but to consent to unconditional surrender to save the nation and the *kokutai*. Like Kido had done one month before, Sato wrote Togo of the possibility that strategic bombing could soon target Japan's food production, causing even greater food shortages and crisis conditions within Japan. Continuing the war would become

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<sup>80</sup> The telegram where Sato informs Togo of the refusal to accept the Japanese mission is in Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku (1952)*, p. 467.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* p. 466. Sato's warnings continued through the following month. For his statement on July 20, see p. 469.

impossible in such conditions, and would result in the destruction of Japan. As a result, he emphasized that unconditional surrender, far from destroying the *kokutai*, would actually save it. "Concerning the question of maintaining the *kokutai*," he stated, "It is a domestic problem and is therefore excluded from the terms of a peace treaty."<sup>82</sup> In short, Sato felt that the *kokutai* was outside the bounds of any agreement with a foreign power. Even if the *kokutai* was initially abolished, he argued that it could be reinstated at a constitutional convention with or without American support.

Nonetheless, Sato's warnings were ignored, and the ineffectual peace feelers continued. Even on August 2, one week after the government decided to "ignore" the surrender terms for Japan that were outlined in the Potsdam Declaration,<sup>83</sup> Togo cabled Sato and informed him that Japan's leaders were still counting on utilizing Soviet influence to help negotiate an end to the war. His statement reads as follows:

Right now the urgent matter for us is to have the Soviet Union agree to receive our envoy. The emperor too is deeply concerned with the development of this issue. The prime minister and the military leaders are also placing their hopes on this one matter. Consequently, although you might have your own opinion, understand this situation and somehow stimulate the Soviet side to accept our special envoy.<sup>84</sup>

In a word, Togo told Sato that the government had no intention of formulating a concrete proposal to bring to the unwilling Soviets, yet they were still relying on Sato to encourage the Soviet leadership to accept Konoe's mission.

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<sup>82</sup> Sato to Togo, in Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku* (1952), p. 472. Also quoted in Herbert P. Bix, "Japan's Delayed Surrender," in Michael J. Hogan (ed.), *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 103. For Sato's fears of a food crisis in Japan, see Gaimusho, p. 471.

<sup>83</sup> The Potsdam Declaration, signed by the United States, China, and the United Kingdom on July 26, 1945, outlined the Allied objectives for Japan. The Japanese empire would be dismantled, the military disarmed, all those designated as war criminals would be punished, and a democratic order would be established. For the full text, see the National Diet Library website, <http://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/c/etc/c06.html>

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Herbert P. Bix, "Japan's Delayed Surrender," p. 104.

This begs a question: If the principal decision-makers in Japan were so concerned with the domestic situation that they planned on bringing about peace through the good offices of the Soviet Union, then why were the peace feelers so feeble? Why were leaders that were concerned with preserving the *kokutai*, the source and legitimacy of their power, so inept at formulating a concrete plan to achieve such an end?

The answer lies in the differing agendas of members of the ruling elite. Though a number of Japan's key leaders feared domestic upheaval, this concern was not strong enough, even by late July, to motivate the principal decision makers to reach a consensus regarding the peace proposal to the Soviet Union. A schism existed among them. On the one hand, moderates like Privy Seal Kido, Navy Minister Yonai, and Prime Minister Suzuki, and Konoe feared a possible social upheaval and therefore desired a negotiated peace to end the conflict in an expedient manner. On the other hand, hardliners Army Minister Anami, Army Chief of Staff Umezu, and Navy Chief of Staff Toyoda were pouring their energies into a speedy implementation of the *Ketsu-Go* strategy. Though the hardliners did not disregard the worsening domestic situation, they pinned their hopes on a decisive victory on the homeland that would strengthen Japan's hand in future negotiations. While open to the idea of negotiations with the Soviet Union, they argued that any peace terms must reflect the fact that Japan was not yet defeated.<sup>85</sup>

Debates became so heated that Yonai had to intervene before the consensus politics among the Big Six completely collapsed. In the end, the peace feelers came to nothing. Agendas differed to such an extent that the Big Six was unable to form a consensus regarding either concessions to offer to the Soviet Union to secure mediation or peace

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<sup>85</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 227.

terms to present to the Allied powers.<sup>86</sup> Approaching the Soviet Union was the only point on which they could agree. In a word, the ruling elite promoted peace feelers that would have been doomed to failure in even the best of circumstances.

### **The Emperor's Decision to End the War**

*Favorable conditions, both foreign and domestic, for a communist revolution increase day by day, and as the war takes more of a toll these conditions will rapidly come to a head.*<sup>87</sup> – Konoe Fumimaro

The Japanese government continued to pursue the conflicting policies of preparing for a final battle for the homeland while awaiting the news of a Soviet decision to mediate an end to the war. Yet by August 9, Japan's state of affairs had drastically changed: the United States had leveled both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Soviet Union had declared war on Japan and begun an invasion of Manchuria. The dual shocks of the atomic bombings and the Soviet onslaught in Manchuria uniquely affected Japanese leaders' perceptions of the war in Asia. Suddenly, Konoe's ominous warning of a communist threat to the *kokutai* seemed dangerously near at hand. The ability of American airpower to inflict increasing damage had the effect of both (1) severely weakening an already strained Japanese morale, and (2) convincing Japanese leaders that the United States would not be forced to invade the mainland in the near future.<sup>88</sup> In

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 227. Such an inability to offer concessions to the Soviet Union is especially peculiar since the Foreign Ministry and Imperial Army apparently came to an agreement regarding maximum compromises to present to the Soviet Union in the May 1945 negotiations, which above all else were designed to keep the Soviet Union out of the Pacific War for another year. For a list of the maximum compromises that the ruling elite had been willing to promote for the May negotiations, see Nakayama Takashi, "Nihon no Senso Sakusen Shido ni okeru Soren Yoin, 1941-1945," *Seiji Keizai Shigaku*, No. 333 (March 1994), p. 52. Nakayama does not reconcile this contradiction in the article.

<sup>87</sup> Konoe Fumimaro (February, 1945), excerpt taken from Konoe no Josobun [Konoe's Memorial to the Throne], in Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku* (1952), p. 198.

<sup>88</sup> Prime Minister Suzuki Kantaro stated the following in December 1945: "The Supreme War Council... was making every possible preparation to meet [an American] landing. They proceeded with that plan until the Atomic Bomb was dropped, after which they believed the United States would

addition, with the Soviet Union rapidly overrunning Manchuria, it appeared that the Soviets would be poised to strike at the mainland ahead of the United States. If such an eventuality came to pass, the Soviets or pro-Soviet sympathizers could make use of the sharply declining morale to mobilize the populace in support of a communist revolution.

As we shall see, the fear of a crisis in Japan's domestic situation became a key factor in the decision to surrender. Of course, fear of social upheaval was not the only issue on the minds of the principal decision makers. The military situation was daunting in itself. The Supreme War Council realized Japan was wedged between the Scylla of repeated atomic strikes and the Charybdis of the Soviet offensive. Inaction could invite disaster. Hence, early in the morning on August 9, they met to consider whether Japan should accept the Potsdam Declaration's demands and surrender unconditionally. Present at the meeting were the members of the Supreme War Council – Prime Minister Suzuki, Foreign Minister Togo, Navy Minister Yonai, Army Minister Anami, Navy Chief of Staff Toyoda, and the Army Chief of Staff Umezumi. Prime Minister Suzuki commenced the meeting with an announcement that the dual shocks of the atomic bomb (the Nagasaki bombing would occur later that day) and the Soviet intervention made termination of the war essential. Suzuki then asked for the opinions of the Supreme War Council. Silence ensued. Yonai broke the silence with the following statement that framed the ensuing debate over whether to accept the Potsdam Declaration:

It's useless to remain silent. If we are to accept the Potsdam Declaration, are we to innocently accept it with no conditions (*mujoken de unomi shite shimauka*), or should we present some terms we desire to attain? Either way, if we decide to attach some desired conditions, we should discuss the following: first, the protection of the *kokutai*; following that, the main items outlined in the Potsdam Declaration, including

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no longer attempt to land when it had such a superior weapon – that the United States need not land when it had such a weapon; so at that point they decided that it would be best to sue for peace.” Quoted in Richard B. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 347.

the punishment of war criminals, methods of disarmament, and the problem of a military occupation.<sup>89</sup>

With that, the other members of the Supreme Council began to state their views, and gradually the Big Six split into two opposing camps. On the one hand, Togo advocated the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration under the singular condition that the Imperial system be preserved. Both Suzuki and Yonai declared their support for his proposal. On the other hand, hardliners Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda stood doggedly opposed to Togo's single-condition surrender. They desired a peace that incorporated all the terms Yonai had originally mentioned, including not only the preservation of the Imperial system, but also the following three conditions: (1) No allied occupation of the Japanese mainland; (2) self-disarmament; and (3) that Japan would try and punish its own war criminals. Were the additional three conditions rejected, they were fully prepared to implement the *Ketsu-Go* strategy and fight a decisive battle for the homeland.

The two sides stood locked in a tense debate for hours, and the meeting ended in early afternoon before a consensus could be reached. Since the Supreme War Council governed by unanimity, as long as the deadlock persisted no concrete decision on whether Japan would surrender could be made. If a unanimous decision were possible, it would have to be reached at the cabinet meeting that was set to begin at 2:30 PM. But with the division that existed amongst the ruling elite, it appeared that no unanimous decision to terminate the war would be forthcoming.

However, Kido, Konoe, and former Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru planned a countermeasure to both exploit such a deadlock and ensure that the government would not accept the additional three conditions promoted by the hardliners. Konoe met with

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Kimijima Kazuhiko, "'Shusen Kosaku' to 'Kokutai' ni kan suru Ichi Shiron," *Tokyo Gakugei Daigaku Kiyo*, Dai Sanbumon Shakai Kagaku, No. 34, December 1982, p. 157.

Kido at 1:00 PM – after the breakup of the Supreme War Council meeting – to request an imperial decision to end the war under the sole condition proposed by Togo. Since such a request broke with the long-established tradition of imperial decisions being arranged by the Cabinet, Kido was initially reluctant to do so. Undeterred, Konoe called on Shigemitsu to convince Kido of the necessity of breaking with tradition and independently arranging for an imperial decision. Shigemitsu met with Kido at 4:00 PM and declared, “If we decide on the four conditions, a breakdown [of the peace process] is inevitable.”<sup>90</sup> He continued,

We cannot overturn the army’s wishes [for the additional three conditions]. The only way to overturn them is by means of an imperial decision (*chokusai*). If we had more time, we could gradually do so, but in today’s case the end is already at hand. This could decide Japan’s fate. We would like you to appeal to the Emperor to do what the Cabinet is unable to do: change Japan’s fate. We want to have you tell His Majesty that the fate of Japan hangs in the balance. If there is anything else that needs to be done in the government, Konoe and I will do it. Please make a direct appeal to the Emperor.

Shigemitsu’s argument persuaded the reluctant Kido to immediately request an audience with the Emperor to arrange both an imperial conference (*Gozenkaigi*) and an imperial decision to terminate the war.<sup>91</sup>

It is unknown whether Prime Minister Suzuki was involved in this covert effort. Perhaps he was, for he ultimately chose to circumvent the continuing deadlock by making the historic request to bring the matter before the Emperor. And perhaps the covert effort extended to other moderates in the wartime ruling elite. Prior to the Cabinet meeting, Togo told Suzuki that since the Cabinet was unlikely to reach a consensus, the

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<sup>90</sup> Kido Koichi, *Kido Koichi Nikki – Gekan*, p. 1223.

<sup>91</sup> Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Shigemitsu Mamoru Shuki* (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1986), p. 523-524. Also in Shinobu Seizaburo, *Seidan no Rekishigaku* (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 1992), p. 307-308. Kido later thanked Shigemitsu for prodding him to get the Emperor involved in ending the war. He was quoted as saying to Shigemitsu, “Thank you very much. Your efforts will long be remembered. I appreciate them from the bottom of my heart.”

only possible solution was for Suzuki to request an imperial decision.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, after the breakup of the Cabinet meeting at just past 10:00 PM, both Yonai and Minister of State Sakonji Masazo attempted to convince Suzuki to do the same. Rear Admiral Takagi Sokichi – Navy Minister Yonai’s aide – writes the following regarding their effort to bring about an imperial decision:

In the middle of the night on [August] ninth, before the imperial conference was called, Minister of State Sakonji whispered to the Navy Minister that a majority decision in the face of opposition could lead to future problems. He advised the Navy Minister to have the Prime Minister ask for an imperial decision (*seidan*). The Navy Minister agreed, and after leaving the meeting, Sakonji told [his plan to] the Prime Minister.

‘Yes, I understand,’ [replied Suzuki].<sup>93</sup>

Owing to such a variety of routes leading to the imperial decision and a lack of information apart from the testimonials of the wartime leaders themselves, it is difficult to ascertain the relative importance of – and connection between – each of these schemes. Perhaps such maneuvers occurred independently. But is it not also possible that as the deadlock persisted, the moderates among Japan’s wartime elite began to work together to push for an imperial decision? Whatever the case, owing to Suzuki’s request and efforts by other moderates, an imperial conference – attended by the Big Six, the Emperor, Privy Council President Hiranuma Kiichiro,<sup>94</sup> Cabinet Secretary Sakomizu Hisatsune, and two others – was called at 11:55 PM to decide the matter.

It was in the presence of the Emperor that the subject of diminishing Japanese morale and the possibility of domestic disturbances was first broached. Anami admitted

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<sup>92</sup> Togo Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan* (New York: Simon&Schuster, 1956), p. 318.

<sup>93</sup> Takagi Sokichi, *Takagi Kaigun Shosho Oboegaki* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1979), p. 348.

<sup>94</sup> According to Sakomizu Hisatsune, Hiranuma attended the meeting “as a representative of the Privy Council,” whose authority was required to formally conclude a treaty. His participation in the *Gozenkaigi*, an anomaly that otherwise would not be tolerated, was meant to ensure that any decision to conclude a treaty could be quickly implemented. In Shinobu Seizaburo, *Seidan no Rekishigaku*, p. 308.

that defeatism and despondency were spreading among the populace.<sup>95</sup> Hiranuma also hinted at the specter of social unrest. This was not the first time that Hiranuma warned the Emperor of such problems. In a 7 February 1945 address to the throne, Hiranuma cautioned Hirohito that a food crisis was on the horizon and even intimated the existence of dangerous thoughts among the populace.<sup>96</sup> During the August 9-10 debates over surrender, Hiranuma's arguments were very much the same. He contended that the "continuation of the war will create greater domestic disturbances than would termination of the war."<sup>97</sup> Unlike Konoe or other figures associated with *YOHANSEN*, Hiranuma, who was notorious for his rabid anti-communism and his vital role in passing the Peace Preservation Law of 1925, ironically did not speak of a grand communist design that aimed to incite a leftist revolution in Japan. However, his analysis lent credence to the notion that Japanese morale was in such a state that it could be mobilized for revolutionary purposes. Hiranuma ended his speech with an appeal to the emperor to prevent social upheaval from breaking out:

In accordance with the legacy of Your Imperial Forefathers, Your Imperial Majesty is also responsible for preventing unrest in the nation. I should like to ask Your Majesty to make his decision with this point in mind.<sup>98</sup>

It is unknown whether Hiranuma's appeal or Anami's concession of spreading defeatism influenced the Emperor in any way. Likely, the Emperor's opinions were already set before the conference even began, for when Suzuki finally requested the Emperor break the deadlock and decide which surrender proposal to adopt, Hirohito did

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<sup>95</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 439 (fn.).

<sup>96</sup> But during his February 7 Memorial to the Throne, Hiranuma failed to suggest any concrete plan to end the war. See Fujita Hisanori, *Jijūcho no Kaiso* (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1987) pp. 47-48; Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, p. 46.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Richard B. Frank, *Downfall*, pp. 293-94.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, p. 174; Also quoted in John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945*, (New York: Random House, 1970) p. 812.

not miss a beat. Without delay, he declared in the early hours of August 10 that he had “given serious thought to the situation prevailing at home and abroad” and had come to the decision that “it was time to “bear the unbearable.” The Emperor continued, “I swallow my own tears and give my sanction to the proposal to accept the Allied proclamation on the basis outlined by the Foreign Minister [Togo].”<sup>99</sup> In short, Hirohito decided to surrender with the sole condition that the Imperial system be safeguarded. The government, in accordance with this decision, sent out cables on the morning of August 10 that announced the conditional acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration.

The Emperor’s intervention thus effectively broke the deadlock and began the process to end the war. However, the American reply, drafted by Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, undermined the fragile unity that Hirohito had forged during the previous evening’s imperial conference. “From the moment of surrender,” it read, “the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese government to rule the state shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers who will take such steps as he deems proper to effectuate the surrender terms... The ultimate form of government of Japan shall, in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration, be established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people.”<sup>100</sup> Such a cautious reply avoided the question of the *kokutai*: it included neither an express commitment to preserve it nor did it presage the *kokutai*’s destruction. But it inflamed many Japanese leaders – including Anami, Toyoda, Umezu, and Hiranuma – who declared that the Allied reply was unacceptable and resolved to make one last-ditch military effort to end the war on more favorable

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan’s Decision to Surrender*, p. 176.

<sup>100</sup> World War II primary source homepage, <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1945/450811a.html>

terms. Once again, Japanese leaders were at loggerheads vis-à-vis whether they should accept the Potsdam Declaration.

However, a political crisis, provoked by an August 14 American “leaflet air-raid” – where B29s dropped on various cities propaganda leaflets that contained the verbatim text of the Japanese government’s decision to end the war – helped resolve this dispute. Kido, who feared that popular knowledge of the government’s secret negotiations could cause “the whole country to fall into chaos,”<sup>101</sup> urged the Emperor again to summon an imperial conference and reiterate his desire to terminate the war. The Emperor agreed to do so and called for an imperial conference, which began shortly before 11 AM the same morning. After listening to the dissenting views presented by Umezu, Toyoda, and Anami, Hirohito once more declared his intention to end the war:

I have listened carefully to each of the arguments presented in opposition to the view that Japan should accept the Allied reply as it stands without further clarification or modification, but in my own thoughts have not undergone any change. I have surveyed the conditions prevailing in Japan and in the world at large, and it is my belief that a continuation of the war promises nothing but additional destruction. I have studied the terms of the Allied reply and have concluded that they constitute a virtually complete acknowledgement of the position we maintained in the note dispatched several days ago. In short, I consider the reply to be acceptable.

The Emperor concluded his speech in a manner designed to brook no argument. This time, he intended to ensure that no future dispute could inhibit Japan’s surrender:

It is my desire that you, my Ministers of State, accede to my wishes and forthwith accept the Allied reply. In order that the people may know of my decision, I request you to prepare at once an imperial rescript so that I may broadcast to the nation. Finally, I call upon each and every one of you to exert himself to the utmost so that we may meet the trying days which lie ahead.<sup>102</sup>

Hirohito thus twice broke the deadlock in the Cabinet and facilitated Japan’s war termination efforts. This very fact heightens his importance in any debate over Japan’s

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<sup>101</sup> Kido Koichi, *Kido Koichi Nikki – Gekan*, p. 1226.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Butow, *Japan’s Decision to Surrender*, p. 207-08.

motivating factors for surrender. For his part, in addition to referring to the power of the atomic bombs and the inadequate preparations to meet an invasion of the homeland, *Hirohito continually cited the domestic situation as a basic reason for ending the war.*<sup>103</sup> As we have seen, he first alluded to the domestic situation as a motivating factor to terminate the war during the July 22 imperial conference; but instead of surrendering to the Allied Powers, a decision was made to use the good offices of the Soviet Union to negotiate an end to the war. Hirohito made the same allusion to the domestic situation in both his August 10 and August 14 surrender speeches, in which he stated that serious thought of the “situation prevailing at home and abroad” convinced him to capitulate. Besides military unpreparedness, which he cared a great deal about,<sup>104</sup> the Emperor was likely referring to two interrelated issues – the hardships suffered by the Japanese people and the possibility that social revolution that could arise from those hardships. Of the two, the fear of the *kokutai* being overturned from within undoubtedly took precedence. Hirohito’s principal interest lay in protecting the *kokutai*, the source of his legitimacy, responsibility, and power, and he realized that the increased popular hostility towards both the government and the position of the emperor represented a threat to which the government must respond. This assessment of the domestic situation came not only from military position papers and interactions with Konoe (from February 1945) and Kido (from June 1945); he had also been informed of the abovementioned Home Ministry reports that described multiple sources of internal insecurity. Without a doubt,

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<sup>103</sup> Hirohito also cited Japan’s inadequate military preparations, the enemy’s scientific power, and even an inability to protect the imperial regalia from the enemy as reasons to end of the war. See Terasaki Hidenari, *Showa Tenno Dokuhakuroku* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1991), pp. 84-85, 126-127.

<sup>104</sup> For an in-depth look at Hirohito’s fear of Japan’s military unpreparedness to meet the Allied invasion, see Terasaki Hidenari, *Showa Tenno Dokuhakuroku*, p. 84, p. 118-120, p. 125-26.

the public statements that railed against the *kokutai* and the emperor worried Hirohito and influenced his willingness to surrender.<sup>105</sup>

But it would be misleading to assume that the domestic situation was Hirohito's only concern. His main loyalties rested above and beyond the Japanese state – with his imperial ancestors and the protection of the three sacred imperial regalia (the mirror, sword, and jewel). If these symbols of the *kokutai* were lost, the *kokutai* itself would cease to exist. Hirohito revealed this concern to Kido in the closing days of the war. On 25 July 1945, he said the following:

If the decisive battle for the homeland occurs, it is possible that the enemy could drop airborne troops in Tokyo and the Imperial Headquarters could be taken prisoner. If that occurs, they could take by force the three imperial regalia, which were entrusted to me by my imperial ancestors. In that case we would not be able to protect either the *kokutai* or the Imperial Family. It doesn't look like I can do anything but endure hardship and press for peace.<sup>106</sup>

Hirohito reaffirmed this concern with the symbols of the throne in his postwar "Monologue," *Showa Tenno Dokuhakuroku*. He stated that the following two factors underlay his decision to end the war:

The first factor that affected my decision at that time was that, in such circumstances, the Japanese race would perish and I would not be able to protect my loyal subjects.

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<sup>105</sup> The sources of domestic concern that helped to persuade the Emperor to surrender also paradoxically provoked concern among the elite that even surrender would trigger massive unrest. This apprehension over social unrest convinced court officials of the necessity to broadcast the surrender announcement and include a warning against "outbursts of emotion" that could lead to "confusion" in Japan. The warning appeared in Hirohito's Imperial Rescript announcing Japan's capitulation, which was broadcast over the radio on August 15:

Having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the Imperial State, We are always with ye, Our good and loyal subjects, relying upon your sincerity and integrity. Beware most strictly of any outbursts of emotion which may engender needless complications, or any fraternal contention and strife which may create confusion, lead ye astray and cause ye to lose confidence in the world. Let the entire nation continue as one family from generation to generation, ever firm in its faith of the imperishableness of its divine land [shinshu no fumetsu o shinji], and mindful of its heavy burden of responsibilities, and the long road before it...

Taken from Herbert P. Bix, "The Showa Emperor's 'Monologue' and the Problem of War Responsibility," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), p. 302

<sup>106</sup> Terasaki Hidenari, *Showa Tenno Dokuhakuroku*, p. 128.

Second, Kido and I were of the same opinion about protecting the *kokutai*. Were the enemy to land at the area surrounding Ise Bay, they would gain control over the imperial shrines at Ise and Atsuta. There would be no time to remove the imperial regalia and no prospects of protecting them. If they were seized, it would be difficult to preserve the *kokutai*, so at that time I determined that, even if I must sacrifice myself in the process, we had to make peace.<sup>107</sup>

In essence, Hirohito admitted that he surrendered to preserve the *kokutai* and its symbols, for if either the Japanese race or the imperial regalia were lost then the *kokutai* would cease to exist as well.

The domestic situation, the military situation, and a responsibility to the imperial ancestors each formed the backdrop to Hirohito's historic decision to end the war. Hirohito, like Konoe in February 1945, felt that he had a choice between the following repugnant alternatives: surrender and have a chance at saving the *kokutai*, or continue to fight and possibly suffer the destruction of the *kokutai* from either without (which would occur if the Allies either destroyed the country or gained control of the imperial regalia) or within.

In addition to the Emperor and Kido, members of the Supreme War Council also pointed to the fear of domestic upheaval as a major factor behind Japan's decision to surrender. Army Chief of Staff Umezumi mentioned loss of public morale as a reason for surrender both on August 10 and August 14.<sup>108</sup> On August 12, in perhaps the clearest statement among members of the ruling elite, Navy Minister Yonai stated that the atomic bombings and the Soviet intervention gave the Japanese leadership a face-saving way to quit the war. The real reason to end the war, he told his aide, Rear Admiral Takagi Sokichi, rested in the domestic crisis:

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<sup>107</sup> Terasaki Hidenari, *Showa Tenno Dokuhakuroku*, pp. 126-27; Nakao Yuji, *Showa Tenno Hatsugen Kiroku Shusei*, p. 384.

<sup>108</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall*, p. 439 (fn.).

I think the term is perhaps inappropriate, but the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war are, in a sense, gifts from the gods [*tenyu*, also “heaven sent blessings”]. This way we don’t have to say that we have quit the war because of domestic circumstances. Why I have long been advocating control of the crisis of the country is neither for fear of an enemy attack nor because of the atomic bombs and the Soviet entry into the war. The main reason is my anxiety over the domestic situation. So, it is rather fortunate that we can now control matters without revealing the domestic situation.<sup>109</sup>

Such cynical pragmatism was evident among other political elites. Konoe labeled the Soviet entry into the war as a “godsend for controlling the army,” and even Suzuki called the atomic bomb a “most convenient pretext for ending the war.”<sup>110</sup> Both had a gnawing fear regarding the growing internal insecurity in Japan and likely saw both the Soviet entry and the atomic bombings as politically expedient ways to end the war before the growing domestic unrest came to a head.

Even the hardliner militarist Admiral Toyoda felt that Japan’s surrender owed to other factors than the atomic bomb and the Soviet entry. In a November 1945 interview for the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, he communicated a view that is strikingly similar to Yonai’s:

I do not think it would be accurate to look upon the use of the Atomic Bomb and the entry and participation of Soviet Russia into the war as direct cause of termination of the war, but I think that those two factors did enable us to bring the war to a termination without creating too great chaos in Japan.<sup>111</sup> [sic]

It is unclear whether this remark expresses Toyoda’s personal view or an unwillingness to admit military defeat to his former military rivals. However, it is quite possible that Toyoda felt, as did Umezu, Yonai, and other political elites, that domestic factors were paramount in understanding Japan’s decision to surrender.

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<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Herbert P. Bix, “Japan’s Delayed Surrender,” p. 106. For the full statement in Japanese, see Takagi Sokichi, *Takagi Kaigun Shosho Oboegaki*, p. 351.

<sup>110</sup> Konoe’s statement was quoted in Bix, “Japan’s Delayed Surrender,” p. 106, and Suzuki’s statement was quoted in Sadao Asada, “The Shock of the Atomic Bomb and Japan’s Decision to Surrender – A Reconsideration,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4, Nov. 1998, p. 497.

<sup>111</sup> United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, p. 320

## Conclusion

The preceding analysis demonstrates the importance of an elite fear of social revolution on the decision to surrender. Concerns over the worsening domestic situation, along with long-standing fears that leftist radicals could mobilize the social unrest for revolutionary purposes, framed discussions on whether to end the war since early 1945. Konoe's nightmare scenario of an international and domestic communist conspiracy officially introduced the idea that Japan must surrender to prevent the outbreak of social revolution. By June, Kido Koichi, who was influenced by his correspondence with Konoe, military position papers, and police reports that dealt with the volatile domestic situation, also perceived a threat to the *kokutai* from within. Though the plan Kido drafted naively sought to make use of the Soviet Union to end the war, its importance rests in its portrayal of a group of elites (particularly Kido, Yonai, Suzuki, Konoe, and Hirohito) that increasingly viewed peace as necessary to save the *kokutai* from social upheaval. And once the atomic bombings and Soviet entry into the war forced the Japanese government's hand, these growing fears of domestic upheaval played a central role in the decision to surrender. They prompted Kido, Konoe, and other members of the conservative ruling elite to work behind the scenes to engineer two separate imperial decisions to end the war. Hence, Yoshida Yutaka was correct to conclude that "those who pushed for the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration had a strong sense of crisis, that if Japan continued fighting any further it would collapse from within (*uchigawa kara hokai suru*)."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Yoshida Yutaka, *Showa Tenno no Shusenshi*, p. 28.

Such a fear of – and a desire to forestall – social revolution, as we have seen, is characteristic of Japan’s conservative ruling elite. But it only spurred some to take positive action to end the war. While elites affiliated with *YOHANSEN*, the court group, and the civilian bureaucracy (particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) pressed for a swift conclusion to the war, the military hardliners insisted on fighting a decisive battle for the homeland even after two atomic strikes and the Soviet entry into the war demonstrated the hopelessness of Japan’s war situation. Yet both groups, ironically, pursued these conflicting policies for the same purpose: the preservation of the *kokutai*, the source and legitimacy of their power and elite status and the center of the Japanese state. On the one hand, a major impetus for the war termination clique was to save the *kokutai* from troubles at home. To them, surrendering was the lesser evil. Though it would subject the fate of the imperial institution to the whims of the Allied powers, they likely saw the immediate threat to the *kokutai* from abroad – should Japan willingly surrender – as more benign than either the threats from within or the risks of attempting to fight a decisive battle for the homeland against a vastly superior nuclear-armed coalition. On the other hand, military elites such as Anami, Toyoda, and Umezu – along with many of their subordinates – were more concerned with events abroad. They perceived the alien Allied powers, particularly America, as greater threats to the preservation of the *kokutai* than either the domestic crisis conditions or the possibility of social upheaval. Hence, these hardliners were willing to risk millions of Japanese lives to protect the *kokutai*.

Perhaps, then, both the war termination clique and the military hardliners’ actions epitomize what we have seen to be the mission of modern conservatism: “not to defeat

but to forestall revolutions, not to crush but anticipate them.” For in 1945, there were two possible revolutions with which the elites had to contend: a revolution from within and one from without. The different groupings within the conservative elite focused on – and worked to forestall – one of these two potential revolutions. While the war termination clique pressed for the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration to prevent the worsening domestic conditions from sparking a revolution from within, the military hardliners were willing to fight to the last rather than risk a revolution from without – one which would occur were the Allied powers to change to the *kokutai* or the Emperor’s status and prerogatives. In the end, the war termination clique, with the Emperor’s assistance, won out, and Japan formally surrendered on 2 September 1945.

It is unlikely, however, that the war termination clique would have won out were it not for the atomic bombings and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet entry into the war. The atomic bombs both displayed the overwhelming might of the American war machine and convinced military leaders that an Anglo-American invasion of the home isles was not forthcoming; the Soviet entry crushed any feeble hopes regarding the possibility for a negotiated end to the hostilities. Taken together, the collective impact of the bombings and Soviet entry persuaded military hardliners and moderates alike of the futility of existing plans for a decisive battle for the homeland or a negotiated peace. And they provided the context in which the Emperor was able to intervene in the policy process. Robert J.C. Butow recognizes the importance of both the atomic bomb and the Soviet entry in creating the situation where the Emperor, aided by Kido and others, could end the war. He writes,

the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet Union’s declaration of war did not produce Japan’s decision to surrender, for that decision – in embryo – had long been taking shape. What these events did do was to create that unusual

atmosphere in which the theretofore static factor of the Emperor could be made active in such an extraordinary way as to work what was virtually a political miracle.<sup>113</sup>

The Emperor's intervention was the decisive element that led to Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration. In addition to the military situation and a responsibility to preserve the *kokutai* and its symbols, this paper has demonstrated that increasing concerns about the deteriorating domestic situation, which many key political elites thought could be mobilized by radicals to overthrow the *kokutai* from within, influenced the Emperor's decision to capitulate to the Allied demands.

In a sense, the multiple motives behind the Emperor's decision accurately reflect the fact that there can be no monocausal explanation for a decision to surrender. His continued allusion to many different sources for his decision to surrender corresponds to the many problems that confront political figures near the end of a war. The military situation, the domestic situation, and the extent of leaders' war aims and responsibilities to the nation all affected the decision for war termination. While it is uncertain the extent to which it affected his decision, fear of social revolution among the conservative elite unquestionably played an important role in convincing the Emperor and other leaders to end the war.

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<sup>113</sup> Robert J.C. Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, p. 231.

## Appendix I: Konoe's Memorial to the Throne

Regrettably, defeat [in the present war] is already inevitable.<sup>114</sup> The following is based on this assumption.

Though defeat will leave a blemish on our *kokutai* (national polity), we should not be unduly concerned since public opinion in Britain and America has not yet progressed so far as to require a change in our *kokutai* (of course some do hold extremist views and it is difficult to know what types of changes will take place in the future). Thus, according to our principles of maintaining the *kokutai*, we should not be as concerned with defeat itself as with a communist revolution that would accompany defeat.

I feel that at the present time, both conditions internal and external to Japan are rapidly progressing towards a communist revolution. That is, outside the country the Soviet Union has made extraordinary advances. Our fellow countrymen do not accurately grasp the Soviet Union's intentions, and have taken lightly the remarkable spread of communist influence (*sekka*) since both the advent of the 1935 Popular Front tactics, that is, the strategy of a 2 stage revolution, and particularly since the recent breakup of the Comintern. This point of view is a superficial and small-minded. Her recent activities in various European countries make it absolutely clear that the Soviet Union has not abandoned her plans to spread communist influence throughout the world.

The Soviet Union is trying to establish Soviet regimes in her surrounding European countries and at the very least pro-Soviet communist regimes in the rest of Europe. She is progressing steadily, and the Soviet Union is for the large part successful in these endeavors.

The Tito regime in Yugoslavia is the best example of this. The Soviet Union also established a new administration in Poland centered on the Polish Emigrants League, ignoring the existence of the exiled Polish government that resides in Great Britain.

If one looks at the armistice conditions in Rumania, Hungary and Finland, though the Soviet Union abides by the principles of noninterference in internal affairs, she has demanded the breakup of organizations that supported Hitler and, when it comes down to it, unless the governments in those countries are Soviet governments, they will be ignored by the Soviet Union [thus, they will have no chance of existing].

Because Iran failed to respond to her demands for oil rights, the Soviet Union compelled the cabinet to resign en masse. When the Swiss government attempted to open up diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union rejected it because they felt the Swiss government to be "pro-Axis powers." As a result of this action, the Swiss foreign minister resigned.

In France, Belgium, and Holland, which are under a combined Anglo-American occupation, a serious struggle continues between the government and armed resistance organizations that were used in the war against Germany. These countries are continually struck by political crises, and the armed resistance groups are commanded mainly by communists. In Germany, as in Poland, England and America intend on establishing a new government centered around the Committee for a Free Germany, but this has been the source of a headache for the Anglo-American powers.

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<sup>114</sup> Taken from Gaimusho, *Shusen Shiroku*, pp. 195-198.

In the face of an apparent commitment to noninterference in the domestic affairs of various European countries, the Soviet Union actually is dragging politics in a pro-Soviet direction.

Soviet intentions toward Asia are the same: to communize Asia. Presently, the Japan Liberation League has been organized around Okano, who came from Moscow. This League is joining forces with the Korean Independence Alliance, the Korean Volunteer Army, and the Formosan Spearhead Corps and is making appeals to Japan.

In reflecting on the above conditions, it is apparent that there is already a significant danger that the Soviet Union will interfere in our domestic affairs (that is, an approval of the Communist party, demands by communists to enter the cabinets of the DeGaulle and Bagdolio Administrations and to abolish the Peace Preservation Law and the Anti-Comintern Pact), and I feel that if one looks at the domestic situation, one can see that day by day all the conditions necessary to achieve a communist revolution are being prepared. Namely, there is impoverishment, an increase in the voice of labor, a rise in hostility towards America and England being expressed alongside a friendly attitude towards the Soviet Union. There are also reformist movements of a ring in the military elite, a movement of "new bureaucrats" that have jumped on the military bandwagon, and leftist elements that secretly attempt to pull the strings from behind the scenes. We should specifically be concerned with the abovementioned reformist movement in the military.

Just as many majors in the military think that communism can exist alongside the *kokutai*, the tenor of reformist theory that military authorities promote supports this. The majority of professional soldiers that come from below the middle class are receptive to communist assertions, and since their military education indoctrinates them with ideas about the *kokutai*, communist elements are continually trying to combine both the *kokutai* and communism into an all-embracing theory.

It is clear that members of the military had a conscious plan to both instigate the Manchurian and China Incidents, and to expand them into the Great East Asian War. During the Manchurian Incident, they declared that the purpose of the incident was domestic reform. During the China Incident as well, one central figure stated "If the incident is solved then domestic reform would not occur, so hopefully the incident will be prolonged."

Although the ring within the military state that the ultimate aim of the military's reform theory is not communist revolution, groups of bureaucrats and interested persons (who can be labeled as left wing or right wing, for the right wing is communism in *kokutai* clothing) consciously intend on dragging it towards a communist revolution, and it is safe to say that simple, ignorant military men are being influenced by them.

For the past ten years I have been acquainted with various groups in the military, bureaucracy, right wing and left wing, and in my recent quiet reflection this is the conclusion I have reached; and when I reflect upon events in the past ten years based on this conclusion, this becomes clear.

During this time [ten years] I have twice been ordered by the emperor to form a cabinet, and since I tried to avoid conflict and friction I, for national unity, accommodated statements by these advocates of reform, and I did not see the intentions hidden behind their statements. For this I assume full responsibility.

Recently, together with announcements of the critical nature of the war situation, voices calling for a "sacrifice of the one hundred million" have gradually increased in strength. Those who make these assertions are right-wingers or communist sympathizers, but they are abetted by communist elements that are trying to fulfill their purpose of revolution by plunging the country into confusion and disorder.

On the one hand, they are thoroughly calling for America and England's destruction. On the other hand, the pro-Soviet mood is becoming stronger. A group within the military argues that no matter what sacrifices we make we should join with the Soviet Union, while others advocate cooperation with Yenan.

As I said before, favorable conditions, both foreign and domestic, for a communist revolution increase day by day, and as the war takes more of a toll these conditions will rapidly come to a head.

Regarding future prospects for the war, it would be great if there were any chance of breaking the deadlock, but looking at defeat as inevitable, the continuation of the war would play into the hands of the Communist Party. Consequently, from the standpoint of protecting the *kokutai*, I am certain that we should be discussing how to end the war as soon as possible.

The biggest obstacle to ending war is the gang within the military that has been the driving force behind the situation from the Manchurian Incident to the present day. Even though they have already lost confidence in the prosecution of the war, to save face they will continue to stubbornly resist to the end.

If we do not purge this gang before we end the war, I fear that once the war ends right wing and left-wing civilian supporters will join with this gang and bring about great domestic disorder, making it difficult to achieve this objective [preventing communist revolution]. Therefore, if we try to terminate the war, it is essential to first purge that militarist gang.

If they are purged, then the bureaucrats and civilian elements on both the right and left wing that are waiting for an opportunity to take advantage of will remain hidden in the shadows. As yet, they do not constitute a major force – they have no means but to use the military to achieve their aims. Thus, if we cut the root, the leaves and branches will eventually wither.

This may be wishful thinking, but if the gang of militarists is purged, then the whole appearance of the army will completely change, and if that happens I wonder then if the atmosphere in America, Britain and Chungking would relax? From the outset of the war, the aim of America, Britain, and Chungking has been the overthrow of this Japanese military clique, but if the character of the military and its policies change, then I wonder if then the Allies may be moved to reconsider the question of continuing the war.

In any event, a purge of the militarist clique and the rebuilding of the military are the necessary conditions to save Japan from an impending communist revolution, and I respectfully urge a resolute decision to that end.

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