

# **Hirohito Re-Examined**

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Following the use of two atomic bombs against Japan by the United States and the entry of the Soviet Union into the war against Japan in the final days of the struggle, World War II came to a close on August 15th, 1945. Determined to the last moment, the Japanese, even in the last desperate days of the war before they capitulated, tried their very best to ensure that, "...the sovereignty of the Emperor of Japan would not be touched."<sup>1</sup> By explicitly stating this expectation in their response to the Potsdam Declaration, Japan prompted a non-committal, vaguely intentioned response from the Allies which left substantial room for interpretation (as the Allies undoubtedly were reluctant to agree explicitly to such a condition).<sup>2</sup> The request, however, did prompt intense deliberation among the Allied Powers as to what the fate of Emperor Hirohito should be, considering both his questionable war responsibility and his possible utility in Japan's recovery process during the occupation.<sup>3</sup> Although the Allied Powers eventually chose to overlook Hirohito's past indiscretions, allowing Emperor Hirohito to retain the throne while strictly curtailing his power and influence, his level of culpability in regard to responsibility for the war has long remained a contested issue among scholars and in the public eye, both in the United States and in Japan. Although MacArthur and his administration (as well as the Japanese government in the days preceding the occupation) worked diligently to reshape the wartime image of Emperor Hirohito in such a way as to absolve him of responsibility for the war and guard him from prosecution as a war criminal, new sources of information have surfaced over the years. This information, along with a marked upsurge in studies and works aimed at reexamining Hirohito's role in the war after his death in 1989, have since provided much clearer insight into Emperor Hirohito's true level of involvement during the war, although his culpability still remains an issue of debate. This work attempts to critically reexamine Hirohito's role in the

war so that a more accurate and telling portrayal of Hirohito may emerge as a result. Although Emperor Hirohito undoubtedly could not have been aware of each and every reprehensible act of war committed in his name, contention remains to show that Hirohito did indeed bear a great responsibility for the war, as he was intimately informed of, and involved in, military affairs, regardless of whether not he was ever prosecuted for it. Furthermore, Emperor Hirohito appears to have needlessly prolonged the length of the war on more than one occasion for reasons which remain unknown but which this paper will attempt to address. Lastly, Hirohito's rescript on surrender delivered via radio broadcast to his subjects, as well as his newly discovered monologue, were nothing more than works designed to conceal his war responsibility and his failures as a leader from public scrutiny. The rescript and the monologue also served to protect him from litigation as a war criminal, allowing the newly invented portrayal of Hirohito's role in the war--a portrayal of his character as an antimilitarist peace seeker--to take root both at home and abroad.

First and foremost, it is important to explain the reasons why Hirohito's culpability for war crimes and responsibility for military decisions were purposefully overlooked despite reasonable cause to believe that he did in fact bear at least some share of responsibility for the war and the acts of war carried out in his name under his rule as emperor. After the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the Japanese government finally made its intent to accept the Potsdam Declaration's surrender demands known, but stipulated that it understood the declaration's meaning to imply that "...the sovereignty of the Emperor would not be touched" and that Japan's surrender was subject to this understanding of the Emperor's sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> Much debate ensued as to what course of action regarding the Emperor should be

taken. After much deliberation it was determined that retaining the Emperor could very well be the key to ensuring Japanese surrender. Therefore, the Allies decided to respond to the Japanese in such a way as to leave room for the Emperor to retain his position while at the same time giving no firm commitment one way or the other.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, the Japanese agreed to the Allied response, despite the lack of explicit guarantee for the Emperor's sovereignty.

In regard to what should happen to Hirohito next, MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers overseeing the occupation of Japan, was ordered by his superiors in Washington to "...take no action against the Emperor as a war criminal pending the receipt of a special directive concerning his treatment."<sup>6</sup> While this did not guarantee that Hirohito would not be tried as a war criminal eventually, it did postpone the decision and any such trial indefinitely despite attempts on behalf of the Australian and Soviet governments to pursue prosecution.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, MacArthur was ordered to "...begin collecting evidence in secrecy concerning Hirohito's culpability, which then would be used to determine the possibility of his trial in the future."<sup>8</sup> Although in the end the final decision spared Hirohito a war crimes trial, it was not an entirely gratuitous subversion of justice, as the Allies intended to use Hirohito "...for the mid- to long-term purpose of military occupation in Japan"<sup>9</sup> in the same way they used the possibility of his retention to secure peace with Japan. As Viscount Addison, then British Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, put it to the Australian government, the hope was "to limit commitment in manpower and other resources by using [the] Imperial Throne as an instrument for the control of the Japanese people."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, others, such as MacArthur, believed as he (MacArthur) wrote in his memoir, that "...if the emperor was indicted, and perhaps hanged, as a war criminal, military government would have to be instituted throughout all Japan, and guerrilla warfare

would probably break out.”<sup>11</sup> It is apparent that, because of these intended purposes and concerns, the United States Government eventually chose to side with MacArthur and grant Emperor Hirohito de facto immunity from War Crimes prosecution.

Despite the Emperor’s informal acquittal, evidence remains that shows Hirohito was involved in, and aware of, military prerogatives and actions undertaken in his name which rightfully ascribe him responsibility for the war, at least in part, without question. First of all, despite Hirohito later making excuses for his acceptance of the Tripartite Alliance, seemingly to deflect responsibility for the decision elsewhere, he was, in actuality, complicit in the direction Japan took at that critical juncture in history.<sup>12</sup> Despite the grain of truth to be found in the fact that on some level he may have initially had misgivings about the alliance, the Emperor reportedly told Kido that, “I believe the signing of the German Military Alliance cannot be helped in the present situation. If there are no other means of dealing with the United States it may be the only solution.”<sup>13</sup>

The Sugiyama Memorandum, a nearly word-for-word transcript of top-secret meetings which Emperor Hirohito held with the chief of staff of the army, has also been instrumental in providing new examples of Hirohito’s involvement in military strategy and planning.<sup>14</sup> For Instance, the memorandum shows that on January 23-24, 1941, Emperor Hirohito was, with his chiefs of staff, working to decide how best to approach the issue of getting permission for Japanese troops to travel freely through Thailand en route to invade Malaya. These documents show Hirohito advising that, due to a strong pro-British sentiment in Thailand, any pact with Thailand would have to be drawn up very carefully and on the sly so as not to alert the British to what was happening.<sup>15</sup>

A more condemning example lies in the events of the July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1941 Imperial Council, which functionally laid out the general plan of and details for the implementation of the war as Japan planned it to proceed. In regard to that particular meeting, a meeting which outlined the general premise and direction of the war, the Emperor is reported to have given his full and supportive assent on the matter in its entirety.<sup>16</sup> More proof of culpability may also be gleaned from the interrogation transcripts produced when the International Military Tribunal of the Far East (IMTFE) questioned key members of the Japanese leadership such as Koichi Kido, the Lord of the Privy Seal. Kido revealed to his interrogator that by July of 1941 the Emperor knew Japan to be committed in earnest to a plan of expansion in the south in pursuit of resources. He also stated that dispatching troops abroad to Indochina would not have been possible had not the Emperor's consent been obtained.<sup>17</sup> Although the examples provided above are varied and lacking continuity to a certain degree, they are arranged so intentionally to provide a small window into the myriad of examples which exist to dispel the myth of an unaware, ill-informed Emperor Hirohito. Although Hirohito can be seen as nervous about the war to a certain degree (as any rational person should have been concerning such a serious and dangerous matter) his misgivings seem to have stemmed from concerns about Japan having insufficient resources to wage war and fear of losing the war, not from any moral objections or misgivings about the justification—or lack thereof—for Japan's actions.

Although World War II continued to rage for over eight months into 1945, it need not have done so, particularly after the other two legs of the Tripartite Alliance had been cut leaving Japan to stand alone against the Allied Powers. Despite unmistakable signs of the war's degeneration in the Allied Powers' favor and the urging of select advisors, Emperor Hirohito

refused both the abdication of the throne as an attempt to preserve the emperor system and surrender itself on more than one occasion and for longer than was rational or necessary to serve any real or useful purpose. As early as January, 1945, Prince Konoe recognized the need to begin preparing for the end of the conflict, and he subsequently began formulating his own scheme, which would help to ease the end of war while simultaneously protecting Emperor Hirohito and the imperial institution as well. Due to the Emperor's indisputable participation in events which culminated in the war, Prince Konoe believed that Emperor Hirohito (and the imperial institution itself) would surely be in a position of great danger if Hirohito were to hold the throne when the war came to a close.

Because Prince Konoe realized that Emperor Hirohito would be in great danger whether or not he actually held the throne at the time of capitulation, he devised a plan allowing that Hirohito, if all went according to plan, would be able to abdicate the throne while escaping prosecution and, in the process, this would allow the imperial tradition of the emperor system to remain intact and whole, thus preserving the *kokutai*. Essentially, the plan was simply to have Emperor Hirohito abdicate the throne to be replaced by his son, Crown Prince Akihito, who, due to his young age, would be overseen by a regent, Prince Takamatsu. After abdication, Hirohito himself was to enter a temple located in Kyoto where he would assume the role of chief abbot and adopt a life of penance and prayer. Despite support from some, such as Admiral Yonai, the plan was not received well by Prince Takamatsu nor, more importantly, by Emperor Hirohito who flatly refused to proceed, not only with Prince Konoe's plan but also with a simultaneously devised plan of the army to have Emperor Hirohito evacuate to a fortified bunker near Mt. Fuji where he could be best protected.<sup>18</sup> Although not a de facto example per say of Hirohito actually

turning down a clear chance to surrender, these examples are significant for two reasons. First, they show that the war was going against Japan's favor enough to warrant the concern of both Prince Konoe and the army. Secondly, it is important because the carefully constructed plans of Konoe and the army should have conveyed significant red flags to Hirohito, yet they appear to have done little or nothing in the way of encouraging him to begin an investigation of how to end the hostilities between Japan and the Allied Powers. This is a demonstration of Hirohito's enduring will to fight despite the odds or any logical assessment of the progression of the war.

Furthermore, Bix states that Hirohito, "...came to view the regalia in his own way, mainly as symbols of his political and moral authority"<sup>19</sup> and that, "As such, they required constant guarding and occasional display to insure the security of the throne."<sup>20</sup> In light of this, it is interesting to note that the emperor not only turned down the plan to evacuate himself to the Matsushiro bunker near Mt. Fuji, but he also demurred a request made by Kido to have the imperial regalia taken there for safe keeping, saying to Kido, "I will share the fate of the sacred relics."<sup>21</sup> Considering Bix's interpretation of Hirohito's stance on the regalia, it seems that the Emperor viewed the imperial regalia as if its well-being was reflective of his reign's health, which possibly indicates that at this point in the war he truly thought it was going well for Japan and that there was no need to shelter himself or the relics nor to give abdication any serious consideration since he was unconcerned for the regalia still.

The following month, on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Prince Konoe, who was by this time markedly uneasy about the state of the war, chose to formally present his concerns to the emperor, despite having already "...tried for more than eighteen months to convey a complex message of dire threat to the emperor if the war continued."<sup>22</sup> Konoe was concerned with two

primary factors that could influence the war and the well-being of Japan's *kokutai*. The first concern was with the Japanese military itself. Within its ranks factions of differing values and purported goals existed which had begun to look potentially threatening. Although the faction known best as the Imperial Way faction had been portrayed as extremists to the Emperor, making them seem the most likely threat from within the army, Konoe believed that any true threat would come from the army's other faction, the Control Faction, which Konoe believed would act to modify the *kokutai* should the war's situation deteriorate any further. In his view, the war had been taking an increasing toll, not only in terms of people and material resources but in domestic opinion as well, so much so that Konoe actually feared a communist uprising led from within, triggered inadvertently by the Control Faction's relentless pursuit of a war that to him already appeared lost in reality.

Konoe's second concern was centered on the Soviet Union. Konoe was certain the Soviet Union would eventually enter the war against Japan for the sake of contending for dominance in East Asia as the Soviet Union "...saw Japan as its biggest threat in East Asia."<sup>23</sup> The Soviets had, at that time, already begun cooperating not only with the Allied Powers of Britain and the United States, but also with China, Asia's most formidable communist power at the time.<sup>24</sup> Although Hirohito did not dismiss Prince Konoe's concerns flippantly, neither did he act upon them in any meaningful way. Furthermore, he was purportedly disturbed by Konoe's assessment of the Soviet Union's intentions; Hirohito and the majority of his cronies at this time were attempting to cling tenaciously to their belief that the Soviet Union would abstain from involving itself in the conflict due to Japan's value as an ally in the potentially looming confrontation between the Communist superpower and the United States.<sup>25</sup>

On the very same day (February 14, 1945), Emperor Hirohito remarked, “If we hold out long enough in this war, we may be able to win, but what worries me is whether the nation will be able to endure it until then.”<sup>26</sup> This is an interesting quote because it may allude to two separate concerns, or possibly both--the possibility of Japan losing the war outright of course, but also the possibility of the domestic populace rising up against the government in the face of unbearable wartime hardship. Whatever the nature of the concern Hirohito may have been trying to voice, it shows that, despite the Emperor’s resistance to ending the war at this time, he knew that the war was not advancing in Japan’s favor.

Even the next day, when told by his intelligence forecasters that the intent of the Soviets was “to secure a voice in the future of East Asia”,<sup>27</sup> Emperor Hirohito maintained his rigid stance on surrender, despite that this was a tell-tale indication of possible Soviet intent to dissolve the Neutrality Pact then in existence between the two countries.<sup>28</sup> In spite of so much evidence to the contrary, Hirohito maintained his conviction that bringing the war to an end would be markedly difficult without one additional gain militarily, which seems to mean, as Bix suggests, that Hirohito believed “The outlook for a negotiated peace could be improved if Japan fought and won one last, decisive battle.”<sup>29</sup> Despite hearing the warnings of Konoe and other advisors, Hirohito continued to support the war effort.

By June of 1945 the war was decidedly proceeding against Japan’s interests. Not only was Hitler dead and war on the European front ended, freeing the Allied Powers to focus their concentrated might exclusively on Japan—the lone tripod leg of the Tripartite Alliance still left standing—but the Soviet Union, by this time, had also made it explicitly clear that their pact of nonaggression would not be renewed again, much to Japan’s chagrined dismay.<sup>30</sup> On June 8<sup>th</sup>,

1945, the War Guidance Council convened, meeting in session with Emperor Hirohito. Instead of discussing the urgent and obvious need for surrender plans, the council drafted a startling resolution named “Fundamental Policy on the Conduct of the War.”<sup>31</sup> The resolution, was passed and “...endorsed that day by Hirohito.”<sup>32</sup> The resolution called for “supreme self-sacrifice”<sup>33</sup> as well as “the honorable death of a hundred million”<sup>34</sup>, in place of rational conclusions such as the best way to approach broaching surrender with the Allied Powers. Whether the honorable death figure was cumulative or only referenced Japanese deaths remains unspecified, although it seems it would not have mattered to the Council members, blind as they seemed to be to the reality rapidly unfolding at their feet. It was not until this latest incident that Kido, who had both supported and encouraged Hirohito on the path of war up until this juncture in time, seemed to have an epiphany, and he immediately began drafting a report for the specific task of urging Emperor Hirohito to begin planning without delay to initiate the close of the war at last.<sup>35</sup>

Despite Kido’s sincere yet belated efforts to sway his stance on capitulation, the Emperor’s conviction did not show signs of wavering until he finally chose to act, over two weeks later, on the day after Japan’s disastrous and blood-soaked loss of Okinawa on June 21, 1945.<sup>36</sup> At this time the Emperor decided to disregard the resolution deemed “Fundamental Policy on the Conduct of the War” passed at the June 8<sup>th</sup> council, ordering Suzuki to immediately begin using Kido’s enlightening report to guide the hand of policy from there on out.<sup>37</sup> Despite Hirohito’s newly altered outlook concerning the path Japan should now pursue concerning the war, these efforts proved to be too little, too late. Hypocritical as it may have seemed, in light of the Emperor’s newly revised stance on the war, it is interesting to note that Hirohito became enraged when he was alerted to the fact that several members of the immediate royal family,

including Higashikuni, Asaka, Prince Kaya, Prince Takamatsu and more, had been meeting under cloak of secrecy since the battle and defeat of Saipan in July, 1945,<sup>38</sup> apparently attempting to put their heads together in order to discretely formulate a strategy well-suited to forcing an end to the war.<sup>39</sup>

Although Emperor Hirohito did eventually send Prince Konoe to the Soviet Union in hopes of having him secure Soviet assistance as mediator for a potential negotiated peace treaty between Japan and the United States (as the United States had done during the Sino-Japanese war of 1904-1905, when the U.S. President, Theodore Roosevelt, served as mediator personally<sup>40</sup>), we now know, through benefit of hindsight, that the mission was doomed from the outset owing to the facts that the Soviet Union never harbored any inclination to serve as mediator and Japan had already rejected the Potsdam Declaration twice by this time, the Potsdam Declaration having been declared the only surrender terms to which the Allied Powers would assent.<sup>41</sup> This inevitably further delayed the end of war. Furthermore, we now know that when Stalin, at the Potsdam conference, asked Truman what course of action he should take in regard to Konoe's belated peace mission, Truman seemed to show no interest in what possibilities such a mission might open, advising Stalin simply to "...act as he thought best."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the Soviet Union continued as it had been doing, stalling Konoe in his mission by refusing an audience, until at long last declaring his mission "...too vague to warrant a visit"<sup>43</sup> and dismissing him. Although Japan was firmly on the path to ruin, being progressively consumed by the Allied Powers' relentless assaults, and it seemed all could soon be lost, Emperor Hirohito continued to cling to some small hope that Japan would have a hand in deciding the conditions upon which the war would end, in effect, prolonging the war once again.

An important question to ask after reviewing such examples of Emperor Hirohito's war conduct is this: Why would the Emperor cling so tenaciously to the war effort, in the face of overwhelming odds and a collapsing national infrastructure, when anything short of an unconditional surrender on the Allied Powers' terms seemed impossible? This question should perhaps be presented for consideration rhetorically, as speculating on motives, despite apparent evidence, unless stated explicitly, may never be fully or truly understood. This author essentially agrees with Bix's assessment, which concludes:

The wartime emperor ideology that sustained their morale made it almost impossibly difficult for them to perform the act of surrender. Knowing they were objectively defeated, yet indifferent to the suffering that the war was imposing on their own people, let alone the peoples of Asia, the Pacific, and the West whose lives they had disrupted, the emperor and his war leaders searched for a way to lose without losing—a way to assuage domestic criticism after surrender and allow their power structure to survive.<sup>44</sup>

This paradigm of thought, replete with absolute and utter disregard for human life and suffering, allowed the Emperor and his wartime leaders to ignore Japan's increasingly imminent destruction in the face of their path of conquest and caused Emperor Hirohito and his wartime leaders to procrastinate in ceasing hostilities, causing the war to rage on far longer than was strictly necessary before coming officially to a conclusion on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Despite the haze surrounding any conclusively derived motivation for Hirohito's actions during the war, whatever his motivation and influences, there is no denying that his action, or inaction depending upon how you view the situation, gratuitously prolonged the hostilities.

In examining Hirohito's behavior and possible motivations, it is important to note that Japan's militaristically inclined culture may have played a seminal role in guiding his decisions to continually prolong hostilities. In a culture where it was more honorable to die than to accept defeat, where sending thousands of men to their certain death even on suicide missions, could be viewed as the most honorable course of action, preferable to defeat and the incumbent shame, it is not surprising to see, from this point of view, why Hirohito and his leaders would continue to work for an ever more elusive victory even when they knew defeat was looming just over the horizon. Edward Drea gives a good example of this culture of military honor and prestige when he notes that "...[Japanese] commanders assured junior officers that counterattacking the invaders would be a most splendid way to die."<sup>45</sup> The average Japanese soldier was readily willing to "perish to preserve his repute."<sup>46</sup> Another factor which may have played a large role in the Emperor's late surrender and handling of the war in general, may be the duality of the nature of his education. He was taught to adhere to both the "Confucian model of the virtuous, peace-loving ruler and the Japanese *bushido* model of the ideal warrior,"<sup>47</sup> conflicting ideologies which he apparently attempted to adhere to simultaneously. This may also have contributed to Hirohito's indecision and vacillation regarding the war. Edward Drea touches on this by weighing in with his opinion "...that historical precedent combined with shared national values shaped Hirohito and his military and naval advisers' response to wartime events."<sup>48</sup>

Following the emperor's final decision to surrender, Emperor Hirohito's cabinet secretary hurriedly prepared the "Imperial Rescript Ending the War," which announced Japan's surrender, while alluding vaguely to the "true" reasons behind Japan's defeat and subsequent surrender in an attempt to subvert the truth.<sup>49</sup> The rescript itself was first drafted by Sakomizu Hisatsune "on

the basis of Emperor Hirohito's words,"<sup>50</sup> before being critically edited by two scholars who specialized in Chinese classics. Essentially, the Emperor's rescript on surrender was a propaganda tool used as a means of domestic damage control, designed "...to redefine his [Hirohito's] new image as a pacifist, antimilitarist, and completely passive onlooker in the war—none of which he had ever been."<sup>51</sup> It was a blatant attempt by the Japanese government to take advantage of the general populace's lack of information in order to completely re-invent Emperor Hirohito's image so as to abdicate his responsibility for the war as well as any horrendous acts carried out in his name. By means of radio broadcast, the rescript was heard by the awed Japanese public on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1945 at noon.<sup>52</sup> In the rescript, the war is misconstrued to an absurd degree, as is Hirohito's personal involvement. The rescript, a poor representation of the truth of the matter, actually contained passages such as this:

We declared war on America and Britain out of Our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and stabilization of East Asia, it being far from Our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark on territorial aggrandizement<sup>53</sup>

It seems evident that passages such as these were nothing more than cheap attempts to minimize Japan's role as an aggressor in the war by attempting to justify Japan's acts of hostility under the guise of necessity undertaken with the best of intentions, a pretext which can be undercut swiftly when considering the manner in which Japan decided to declare war upon the United States.

Another claim made within the rescript (which is categorically untrue as well as downright ridiculous) is the insinuation that Emperor Hirohito should actually be regarded as the savior of the human race, owing to the fact that, if Japan had not acted to surrender in response to

the United States' sudden use of nuclear weaponry, the continued use of the nuclear weapons would have resulted in the "...ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also...total extinction of human civilization."<sup>54</sup> Although the continued conflict may indeed have had dire consequences, particularly if further nuclear arsenals were used, it is extremely audacious to insinuate, as the rescript did, that Hirohito was some type of world savior, particularly when you examine how he helped to prolong the war. If he had acted sooner and more decisively to bring hostilities to a close, perhaps nuclear weapons would never have been used against Japan.

By making use of preposterous claims such as these, Hirohito's spin doctors were able to make sure that "Hirohito's 'sacred decision' [to surrender] both described and legitimized his act of ending the war by casting it in the most morally acceptable light."<sup>55</sup> Despite the apparent absurdity of such claims, particularly in hindsight, they did serve their intended purpose well, shielding Hirohito's decision of surrender itself from criticism, as well as representing the events related to surrender in such a way as "to fit the preexisting imperial narrative of his reign"<sup>56</sup> which served MacArthur well in his efforts to keep Hirohito from trial, or as Bix puts it, "...at the very beginning of the occupation the Japanese defensive strategy for protecting the *kokutai* and MacArthur's occupation strategy coincided."<sup>57</sup>

Once a definitive decision was reached that the Emperor would not be tried as a war criminal, MacArthur quickly took action to ensure that incriminating evidence (that could jeopardize Hirohito's immunity from prosecution) was dealt with, enlisting Bonner Fellers, a former Brigadier General<sup>58</sup> and OSS (Office of Strategic Services) member<sup>59</sup>, to work towards saving the emperor.<sup>60</sup> MacArthur's plan for dealing with Hirohito's situation was given the code-

name Operation Blacklist, its primary objectives being to somehow separate Hirohito's image from that of the militarists, while at the same time allowing him to retain the throne and function as a figurehead-monarch who could be used to "...bring about a great spiritual transformation of the Japanese people."<sup>61</sup> Fellers quickly set to work with his investigation and was very diligent in his work. By conducting numerous private investigations of accused Japanese war criminals, Fellers was able to coordinate the corroboration of their testimonies so they would best shield Emperor Hirohito from war responsibility (and also inadvertently creating a clear, albeit re-imagined image of wartime responsibility distribution among the accused Japanese he was interviewing, which could be used to swiftly and easily prosecute them).<sup>62</sup>

Immediately upon having concluded his series of private interrogations, Fellers immediately summoned Admiral Yonai to discuss handling the requests from other Allied countries to try Hirohito as a war criminal, advising Admiral Yonai that General Tojo should be made to accept full responsibility for the war in order to protect the Emperor.<sup>63</sup> Tojo, in prison hospital recovering from an attempted suicide, embraced the plan willingly, as he understood that the fate of the Emperor essentially hinged on his upcoming testimony.<sup>64</sup> Despite, Tojo's willingness to accede to their plans, MacArthur and his administration, as well as Emperor Hirohito and his, felt it wise to prepare a defense should the need suddenly arise due to the fact that, despite their efforts, there was no way for them to guarantee his exemption from the war crimes trials, whether as a criminal on the stand or a witness. To this end, what is now known as the Showa Monologue came to be through multiple interviews with the Emperor in which he provided his side of the story and fielded questions pertaining to specific points MacArthur's administration wanted addressed.<sup>65</sup> However, the Monologue remained virtually unknown until

its publication in December of 1990 after Terry Terasaki's daughter Mariko, who was not able to read any Japanese, had it published in Japan.<sup>66</sup>

Ironically, despite the Showa Monologue's apparent purpose to serve as a partially-fabricated safeguard should the Emperor be called to the stand in war trials, the Showa Monologue itself actually serves more to incriminate Hirohito than to absolve him. Despite the revised image of Hirohito the Monologue was intended to portray, the Monologue at times seems to highlight his involvement in the war, inadvertently painting a more accurate but more incriminating image of Hirohito's wartime involvement.<sup>67</sup> For example, in the monologue Hirohito attempts to justify his prolonging of the war by reverting to his defense of the pursuit for one last decisive battle:

I wanted to strike the enemy just once, anywhere, and quickly obtain the chance for peace. But having given a firm promise to Germany not to make a unilateral peace, I did not, for reasons of international trust, want to discuss peace before Germany did. Therefore I even went so far as to want Germany to be defeated as quickly as possible.<sup>68</sup>

He even discusses advice he wished to be given to Germany during the war:

At the beginning, when the United States and Britain planned to conquer Africa, I warned Tojo to recommend to the Germans that rather than give priority to their war against the Soviet Union, they should give priority to Africa. . . Next when the United States and Britain landed in France, I asked Germany to strike the Anglo-Americans with their main force and to limit their actions against the Soviet Union to simple defense.<sup>69</sup>

Although designed to function essentially as propoganda to protect the Emperor should he stand trial, his own cavalier admissions in reality paint a much more accurate picture than the either MacArthur's or his own administration's records ever did, however ironic. As Bix puts it, these admissions also "...further dispel the 'bystander' image of Hirohito found in conventional scholarship (where he is depicted as a passive monarch immobilized by his constitutional scruples)."<sup>70</sup>

Other evidence of Hirohito admitting culpability appear in records of Hirohito's meetings with MacArthur. Large, who generally portrays Hirohito sympathetically, reports that Hirohito told MacArthur at their first meeting:

I come to you, General MacArthur, to offer myself to the judgement of the powers that you represent as the one to bear sole responsibility for every political and military decision made and action taken by my people in the conduct of war.<sup>71</sup>

While Large provides this and other extensive quotes, he later states that no records were kept of the eleven meetings between Hirohito and MacArthur "apart from summary digests prepared by the emperor's translators for the foreign ministry, most of which remain highly classified."<sup>72</sup> Bix cites Hirohito saying repeatedly in the Showa Monologue, "Even at the sacrifice of myself" as a means to convey "a sacrificial spirit".<sup>73</sup> Bix then asks, "what...did those words mean when measured against the scores of millions who, by that time, had died in his war?"<sup>74</sup> It becomes clear that conflicting portrayals of Hirohito will persist, both the saint who had nothing to do with the war and the martyr who will take full responsibility. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between.

In conclusion, Hirohito did indeed bear a great responsibility for the war, although certainly not the entirety of it. It has been shown that he gratuitously prolonged the war through indecision and the refusal to accept the reality of the situation, tenaciously clinging to a hope of one last decisive victory until nearly the end of the war. Furthermore, Emperor Hirohito's rescript on surrender as well as the Showa Monologues were tools designed to re-invent the emperor's image both at home as well as abroad. While his actions pertaining to the war certainly warrant trial as a war criminal, this author reserves judgement on whether or not MacArthur's administration made the correct decision in allowing Hirohito to retain the throne. While justice would have been served should Hirohito have been tried and found guilty, given Japanese culture and the emperor's role in the hearts and minds of the people, not just as Emperor but as a deity, this author believes it is certainly possible that MacArthur's nightmarish vision of Japan's disintegration into a chaos due to the loss of the emperor was a realistic concern. In this scenario, in order to maintain any semblance of peace and order "...a million troops would be required which would have to be maintained for an indefinite number of years."<sup>75</sup> Because of the competing demands of justice (possibly accompanied by severe backlash from the Japanese public) and preservation of a nation, this author does not believe we will ever know if it was the "right" decision to abstain from prosecuting Hirohito. Despite the fact that MacArthur's administration initially left the door open for potential prosecution at a later time, doing so may have been difficult given the thorough job they did in covering up the emperor's culpability. While the competing demands of justice and national preservation along with the competing versions of the truth have obscured Hirohito's role in World War II, this examination of the facts shows the emperor's actual culpability as well as the rationale for the fabricated version of his

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involvement in the war. Although many questions about Hirohito's motivations, culpability, feelings and life will undoubtedly remain a mystery, there is no doubt that Emperor Hirohito will continue to be studied throughout the years due to the shifting, enigmatic wake he left in history though his action as well as his inaction.

**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Yuma Totani, The Tokyo War Crimes Trial: The Pursuit of Justice in the Wake of World War II (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), p. 45
- <sup>2</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 45
- <sup>3</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 51
- <sup>4</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 45
- <sup>5</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 46-47
- <sup>6</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 56
- <sup>7</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 53, 59-60
- <sup>8</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 53
- <sup>9</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 51
- <sup>10</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 51
- <sup>11</sup> Totani, Tokyo, p. 57
- <sup>12</sup> Herbert P. Bix, Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000. Print.), p. 382
- <sup>13</sup> Edward Behr, Hirohito: Behind the Myth (First edition. ed. New York: Villard, 1989. Print.), p. 187
- <sup>14</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 190
- <sup>15</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 191
- <sup>16</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 203-204
- <sup>17</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 196
- <sup>18</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 283-286
- <sup>19</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 63
- <sup>20</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 63
- <sup>21</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 286
- <sup>22</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 488-489
- <sup>23</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 488
- <sup>24</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 489
- <sup>25</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 489
- <sup>26</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 490
- <sup>27</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 490
- <sup>28</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 490

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- <sup>29</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 490
- <sup>30</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 292
- <sup>31</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 293
- <sup>32</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 293
- <sup>33</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 292
- <sup>34</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 292-293
- <sup>35</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 293
- <sup>36</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 293, Bix, Making of Modern, p. 493
- <sup>37</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 293
- <sup>38</sup> Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006. Print.), p. 28
- <sup>39</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 278
- <sup>40</sup> Hasegawa, Racing the Enemy, p. 8
- <sup>41</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 522
- <sup>42</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 295
- <sup>43</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 295
- <sup>44</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 520-521
- <sup>45</sup> Edward J. Drea, In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army (Studies in War, Society, and the Military) (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. Print.), p. 153
- <sup>46</sup> Drea, In the Service, p. 153
- <sup>47</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 59
- <sup>48</sup> Drea, In the Service, p. 171
- <sup>49</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 525-526
- <sup>50</sup> Herbert P. Bix, "The Showa Emperor's "Monologue" and the Problem of War Responsibility," Journal of Japanese Studies, Vol 18, No. 2 (1992), p. 295-363
- <sup>51</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 527
- <sup>52</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 526
- <sup>53</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 407
- <sup>54</sup> Behr, Hirohito, p. 407-408
- <sup>55</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 529
- <sup>56</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 529
- <sup>57</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 545

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<sup>58</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 582

<sup>59</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 582

<sup>60</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 582-583

<sup>61</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 545

<sup>62</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 583

<sup>63</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 584

<sup>64</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 584-585

<sup>65</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 589

<sup>66</sup> Bix, "The Showa Emperor's 'Monologue,'" p. 298

<sup>67</sup> Bix, "The Showa Emperor's 'Monologue,'" p. 352-353

<sup>68</sup> Bix, "The Showa Emperor's 'Monologue,'" p. 353

<sup>69</sup> Bix, "The Showa Emperor's 'Monologue,'" p. 352-353

<sup>70</sup> Bix, "The Showa Emperor's 'Monologue,'" p. 354

<sup>71</sup> Stephen Large, Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan: A Political Biography (*Nissan Institute Routledge Japanese Studies Series*), 1 ed. (New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.), p. 135

<sup>72</sup> Large, Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan, p. 137

<sup>73</sup> Herbert P. Bix, "Japan's Delayed Surrender: A Reinterpretation." Hiroshima in History and Memory. Ed. Michael Hogan. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.), p. 111

<sup>74</sup> Bix, "Japan's Delayed Surrender," p. 111

<sup>75</sup> Bix, Making of Modern, p. 568

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## **Bibliographic Essay:**

Yuma Totani's book, *The Tokyo War Crimes Trial: The Pursuit of Justice in the Wake of World War II* details the ins and outs of the Tokyo War Crimes Trials. I used this book primarily to find information regarding actions taken immediately after the war by the Allied Powers for the prosecution of war criminals and in particular, the handling of Emperor Hirohito from the time of Japan's tentative response to the Potsdam Declaration. It was particularly useful in addressing complaints that Allied countries like Australia and Britain had about retaining the Emperor. Although I made good use of this book, I was more interested in preliminary information pertaining to the handling of Hirohito and less interested in the war crime trials themselves.

The next book I used extensively is Herbert P. Bix's *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*. Although I was not able to read it in its entirety owing to its vast 800 page length, it was a veritable fount of knowledge pertaining to Hirohito, as it is a detailed biography of him that covers his entire life. Bix makes compelling arguments that aim to dispel any notion of Hirohito being free from culpability by painting a vivid picture of his involvement throughout the war. This book was particularly useful and informative when I was seeking examples of how Hirohito prolonged the war. I also found much of my information about Hirohito's rescript on surrender broadcast in this work. I really like this book. It is very rich in detail while still being easy and enjoyable to read, although Bix definitely does seem to take an extremely strong anti-Hirohito stance throughout its entirety. While I don't feel that I judge Hirohito quite as harshly as he does in this work (and has in others), I do feel fairly aligned with many of his viewpoints and find his book tremendously insightful.

I also made good use of another of Bix's works, entitled "The Showa Emperor's 'Monologue' and the Problem of War Responsibility," a very interesting article from a 1992 issue of *Journal of Japan Studies* which once again tackles the issue of Hirohito and war responsibility, this time through analysis of both his rescript on surrender broadcast (to a lesser extent), as well as the Showa Monologue. This was a particularly useful work as it helped me find specific examples from the Showa Monologue to support the arguments I made about Hirohito's military involvement.

Edward Behr's *Hirohito: Behind the Myth* was a great help to me in constructing my exploration of the re-imagined, pacifist image of Hirohito throughout my paper as it provided many good examples of Hirohito's clear involvement in the war. Like Bix's work, it is a detailed biography of Emperor Hirohito although, in my opinion, it is executed with a bit less finesse. It is a 438 page book with no table of contents and no chapter titles which made it a bit hard to work with at times. The reason for this I believe is that Behr is a journalist and not a trained historian. However, despite the credentials he lacks, the book is extremely informative and well written, drawing on a wealth of both English and Japanese primary and secondary documents. I was impressed that a journalist would undertake such an endeavor, as Hirohito's life was neither short nor simple. Like Bix, Behr seems to take a fairly hard line against Emperor Hirohito, similarly calling out his indiscretions and involvement in the war. Besides good examples of how Hirohito

prolonged the war, I also found some useful examples showing Hirohito's direct involvement in military affairs and Konoe's peace mission to the Soviet Union.

*Racing the Enemy* by Tsuyoshi Hasegawa deals largely with the end of WWII and is unique because of his ability to make use of not only English sources, but Japanese and Russian ones as well, allowing for what some would consider a more rounded outlook on the end of the war in the Pacific. It is a wonderful book, and I primarily used it to for information pertaining to the Russo-Japanese War, as much of the information I otherwise would have used was available elsewhere. I also used it to look up when Saipan fell. While he does not take such a hard-line against Hirohito in the manner of Behr and Bix, he is highly critical of him, even going so far as to say that Hirohito should have abdicated after the war.

Edward J. Drea's *In the Service of the Emperor* is a compelling window into the Japanese military during WWII which seemingly attempts to analyze and interpret the why behind Japanese military action during WWII, making good use of both English and Japanese sources. I use his work to provide examples of the honor-and-duty-bound, fanatic mentality the Japanese Imperial Army seemed to possess and to shed a little light on why military leaders, particularly Hirohito, acted as they did even in the face of defeat.

I also make brief use of Stephen Large's *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan: A political biography*, in which Large portrays Hirohito in what I would consider a fairly positive light, and Herbert P. Bix's article "Japan's Delayed Surrender" which appears in the collection of essays entitled *Hiroshima In History and Memory*, edited by Michael J. Hogan. I make use of them together to exemplify the varied opinions of Hirohito which various scholars and historians hold, some like Large painting a fairly flattering picture of Hirohito, some like Bix and myself, not so much.