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SISEA 590

Good Neighbor North – Sino-Japanese Relations and the Surrender of Japan

The orthodox view of the end of WWII is that the bombs were dropped in order to end the war as efficiently and with the minimum loss of life while still ending on Allied (American) terms. Along with this view is that the late entry of the Soviet Union was simply a last effort of opportunism, joining in to reap the rewards promised at the Yalta convention, a so-called “thief in the fire”<sup>1</sup>, stealing in while the house was coming down. Orthodox views by Russian specialists see the Soviet entry as **the** linchpin in finally forcing Japan’s surrender on August 15. By looking at the varying hostile relationship between the Soviet Union and Japan through the 30’s coupled with uneasy neutrality during the war and then the final events in August 1945, one can say that the Soviet entry, along with the atom bomb attacks and the heavy last B-29 bombings together had together an impact deep enough both physically and psychologically to finally bring Japan to accept the conditions of surrender. The Soviet entry, although opportunistic in how it attempted to seize beyond its promised concessions at Yalta, should not have its efforts discounted. Its invasion into China during the last seven days of the war helped in bringing home to Japan that there was no side still defensible. America’s combination of air and nuclear attacks on the homeland along with Russia, the last (but not least) threat to Japan to finally strike closed the country

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks Lester. *Behind Japan’s Surrender: The Secret Struggle that ended an Empire*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968. pg. 16.

off completely to future possible negotiations without further risk to itself, and thus these factors together were the linchpin in forcing the Japanese government to finally go through the final diplomatic measures to end the war.

Tensions in foreign policy between the Soviet Union and Japan did not begin in 1931 when Japan invaded Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo, but it is accurate to say that the uneasy relations between these two countries advanced at a higher rate in the 1930's than in the previous decade. One can go back to the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-1905 in discussing these tensions, especially since the Soviet concessions at the end of WWII directly related to what they considered the Japanese took from them in 1905. For this paper though, the focus will be from the 1930's until the end of war.

Whether or not the Soviet and Japanese leaders were prepared to speak out publicly about their distrust for each other, their actions reveal their agendas. Following the 1931 "liberation" of Manchuria, both Soviet and Japanese military forces began a steady buildup in North East Asia, specifically focused on the borders between Manchukuo, Outer Mongolia and the Soviet Union. From 1932 to 1939, both the USSR and Japan increased their infantry stationed in these areas from 2:1 to 10:3 respectively, with the Japanese Kwantung Army utilizing its connected infantries in Korea if needed.<sup>2</sup>

On October 23, 1936, Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany which outlined plans of communication and promised action against any advancement of Communist power. One can see this is a direct statement

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<sup>2</sup> Hata, Ikuhiko. "The Japanese-Soviet Confrontation, 1935-1939." *Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the USSR, 1935-1940*. Edited by J. W. Morely. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976. pg. 131.

to the Soviet Union from both countries. An added, secret protocol on the Anti-Comintern Pact was that in order to protect the “common interests” of both Japan and Germany<sup>3</sup> against the labeled Communist threat of the USSR, the countries agreed:

Should one of the High Contracting Parties become the object of an unprovoked attack or threat of attack by the USSR, the other High Contracting Party obligates itself to take no measures that would tend to ease the situation of the USSR. <sup>4</sup>

The secret protocol in the pact alerts to growing tensions that in fact a war between either party with the Soviet Union was considered imminent and if so, both agree not to aid the USSR if in fact future confrontation occurs. So as Germany and Japan advanced their own territorial agendas in Europe and Asia, both kept a careful watch over their seemingly aggressive northern neighbor.

1937 saw the beginning of Japan’s war with China as well as increased hostilities with the Soviet Union. On August 23, 1937, a month and half after the Marco Polo Bridge incident where the war had started, China signed a pact of non-aggression with the Soviet Union. Along with this pact, the USSR sent into China military aid, including ammunition, air craft and advisors to fight against the Japanese. Through the following year, disputes over not only borders between the countries were increasing but also conflict erupted over fishing rights and the

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<sup>3</sup> World peace was also included as something for both countries to protect from the “Communist International.”

<sup>4</sup> “Appendix 1: The Japanese-German Anti-Comintern Pact and Related Documents.” *Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the USSR, 1935-1940*. Edited by J. W. Morely. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976. pg.263.

exploitation of the northern half of Sakhalin, an island that has been fought over since it was split after the Russo-Japanese war.<sup>5</sup>

Border disputes between Manchukuo and the Soviet Union numbered nearly 200 between 1937 and 1939.<sup>6</sup> Although Japan had yet to make any public declaration against the USSR, on July 3, 1938, the Japanese army circulated its own “hopes” for foreign policy. In regards to the Soviet Union, the army’s main policy was to impede any Soviet involvement in the war in China. It also included the goal of increased economic development within China and Manchukuo, and expand military force within Manchukuo in order to be on par with the Soviet Union. Added details of foreign policy plans with the Soviet Union also incorporated:

- Propaganda should be disseminated in Britain, the United States, and France, telling the truth about the Soviet Union and its untrustworthy behavior, so as to discredit and isolate it internationally.
- Direct relations with the USSR should be conducted fairly and firmly, with particular attention to insuring that the Soviet Union adheres to the letter of existing treaties.
- Soviet schemes in China and its illegal activities vis-à-vis Japan and Manchukuo should be publicized in order to arouse domestic public opinion.
- A non-aggression treaty between Japan and the USSR should not be concluded.<sup>7</sup>

On July 11, Eight days after the army released the above statements, another skirmish erupted between the two powers. The Changkufeng Incident started as

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<sup>5</sup> Young, Katsu H. “The Nomonhan Incident: Imperial Japan and the Soviet Union.” *Monumenta Nipponica*. Volume 23, Issue 1/2, 1967. pg.83.

<sup>6</sup> Young 88

<sup>7</sup> “Appendix 3 – The Army’s Hopes Regarding Current Foreign Policies, July 3, 1938.” *Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the USSR, 1935-1940*. Edited by J. W. Morely. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976. pg. 270. (It is noted here that this document is originally taken from the *Kono Papers*, now published in Japanese in *Gendai shi Shiryou* 9.)

challenge between Soviet forces, the Kuantung army and Japanese government requested Korean troops over a hill in the contested plains bordering Manchukuo, the USSR, and Korea. The battle lasted over a month and finally concluded when the Japanese Ministries of War and Foreign Policy introduced a truce with the Soviets where Japanese troops would retreat one kilometer from the hill.<sup>8</sup>

The revelation of the Kuantung army having lesser tactical and technical experience and weapons in comparison to their Northern adversary and failing because of it brought on this concession and the initial shock from the Soviet backlash in protecting its defenses on the hill. Although its foreign policy was advocating the diminishing of Soviet power in Northeast Asia, Japan had come to terms with the fact that it was not yet prepared for war with it. Therefore a truce was speedily settled, but the shock and realization from this incident did not in fact overtly change the Kuantung army's tactics and technology as seen in the following year near the border with Outer Mongolia in the village of Nomonhan.

The Incident<sup>9</sup> at Nomonhan was significant for various reasons in Soviet-Japanese foreign policy. For one, it was the last battle until August 1945 between the countries. For another, the magnitude and carnage that quickly spiraled out and tore down the Kuangtung army was, like the battle the year before, a shock to the Japanese government. The events of August 1939 would mirror in a way the August six years later, although in no way compares to the loss of life in the last days of war. The reflection can be seen in the surprise in

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<sup>8</sup> Young 85

<sup>9</sup> No one wanted to refer to it as an outbreak of war although that may be a better description due to the amount of divisions, and weapons utilized in the fifth month battle.

the Japanese military and government taken aback by the failure of their own forces along with the plotting of other foreign powers around them.

The fighting had been escalating for months over this disputed area between Outer Mongolia (which had connections with the USSR and Manchukuo). On August 20, the Russian army again struck hard, utilizing tanks and full weaponry and culminating in a climatic battle. By August 23, there were over 11,000 casualties on the Japanese side.<sup>10</sup> On that same day, another shock was felt when it was revealed that without any notice to Japan, Germany had signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. Japan was taken aback, not just because their intelligence measures had not picked up previous word of this alliance, but also because this violated the Anti-Comintern pact signed three years earlier. Also at that moment, the Soviet Union was Japan's biggest foreign threat, and the fact was now that Japan's alliance with Germany would in no way aid it if in fact Japan went to war with the USSR. This was another blow to their plans in expanding into Northeast Asia. A report from the Soviet Embassy to the Head of the Red Army in Moscow detailed the reaction of the Japanese public on August 26:

Reports of a possible conclusion to a non-aggression pact between Germany and the USSR have had a stunning effect on the Japanese circles and government; the media are full of this issue which they describe as the greatest event after the World War.<sup>11</sup>

The event was stunning enough to lead to the dissolving of the Hiranuma Kiichiro's cabinet on August 28, replaced by Abe Nobuyuki two days later. But

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<sup>10</sup> Young 91

<sup>11</sup> Gavrilov, Victor. "Certain New Aspects of the Run-up to the Soviet-Japanese War of 1945." *Far Eastern Affairs*. No. 4, 1995. pp. 64.

the Government was not the only thing redesigned. As the battle worsened and after the release of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, Japan went forth quickly in attempt to end the dispute. It was on September 15, 1939 that a truce was made and the "Incident" of Nomonhan finally came to end with casualties numbering over 18,000 on the Japanese side and 9,000 on the Soviet-Mongolian side.<sup>12</sup> The truce itself focused on ending the fighting by the 16, and having each side remain where they were at that time of cease-fire with the agreement later to assemble a committee to properly draw out the borders between the two sides. In the following weeks after Nomonhan, Japan saw now that probably the best path to take was not to challenge the Soviet Union outright, although it would not be until April 13, 1941 that it would sign its own non-aggression or neutrality pact with the USSR.

The timing of the neutrality pact was before either country entered the "World War". The Soviet Union was still not in the European theater and this was seven months before the attack on Pearl Harbor and the US entry into the war. Both sides at this time decided to close off one possible front by neutralizing it. The terms of the pact were for each country to respect the other's sovereignty as well as to remain neutral if the other began warring with a third party. Both parties saw this agreement for that time to be the most mutually beneficial. The parting words of Foreign Minister Matsuoka and Stalin on the train platform following the pact demonstrate best the optimistic mood of the signing:

Stalin: The European Problem can be solved in a natural way if Japan

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<sup>12</sup> Bix, Herbert P. *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000. pg. 351 (Japanese losses) Soviet-Mongolian losses were reported were released after the war at the trials in Tokyo. Hata 176.)

and the Soviets can cooperate.

Matsuoka: Not only the European problem. Asia also can be solved!

Stalin: The whole world can be settled!<sup>13</sup>

One of the biggest ironies in the signing of the neutrality pact was how quickly it almost dissolved with Germany's attack on USSR two months later. Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and the USSR entered into the war officially. Matsuoka, who only two months earlier was arm in arm with the Soviet leader, advocated now for an attack on Japan's northern neighbor while its interests were split between two fronts. On July 5, 1941, in a cable to the German Ambassador in Tokyo, Foreign Minister Ribbentrop recounted a talk with Matsuoka where the Japanese Foreign Minister had observed that:

No Japanese prime minister or minister of foreign affairs will be able to keep Japan neutral if there is a conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union. In that case Japan will have to naturally attack Russia fighting on Germany's side. And no neutrality pact could do a thing there.<sup>14</sup>

And in fact, Matsuoka partly followed this statement by pushing forward with the transfer of 700,000-800,000 troops to the Manchukuo border during the summer of 1941 with plans to attack by September. Those planning worked out that if Japan would attack at all, it would have to allot enough time for combat and maneuvers before the winter would set in, so by November of that year.

Following Germany's attack on Russia, the army drew out a quick list of actions

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<sup>13</sup> Lensen, George Alexander. *The Strange Neutrality: Soviet-Japanese Relations during the Second World War: 1941-1945*. Tallahassee: The Diplomatic Press, 1972. pg. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Gavrilov 75. Ribbentrop here was, through the channels, trying to remind Matsuoka of this statement and to encourage Japan's entry against Russia.

for what was considered an imminent clash between Russia and Japan. The schedule started from June 28, where the decision to assemble troops was passed, and followed dates of transfer and preparation, finally leading up to the latest date to begin combat, September 10, with the “first phase of the war” finishing on October 15.<sup>15</sup> Part of the deciding factor in whether to strike forth across the border was left in the hands of Germany and its progress with the Soviet Union. If Germany’s push forward into Russia significantly weakened the Soviet army, then Japan saw it was relevant enough to disavow the earlier neutrality pact. But if invasion into Russia was not a hard enough blow, then it was beneficial for Japan to hold on to its previous agreement with Stalin. In the meantime, the Japanese military in China was strengthened while Japan’s leaders waited to see how Germany’s attack would fair.

Yet the invasion in Russia did not bring down the Soviet forces as quickly as Germany had hoped. On August 9, the Japanese government gave the command to reinforce the border between Manchukuo and the USSR, but also that focus was changing and moving south in order to prepare for future war with The US and Britain.<sup>16</sup> As the year came to a close, Japan came forward to renew talks with the Soviet Union. On November 22, 1941, then Foreign Minister Togo met with Soviet Ambassador Smetanin to reaffirm the Soviet agreement of neutrality and if in fact Japan went to war with a third party, that this neutrality would of course extend to not allowing the establishment of third party bases on Soviet soil. Smetanin reassured Togo then that the Soviet Union had no plans of

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<sup>15</sup> Coox, Alvin D. *Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, Volume 2. 1985. pg. 1038.

<sup>16</sup> Coox 1049

backing away from its agreement.<sup>17</sup> And thus, on the eve of the US's entrance into the war, the Soviet Union and Japan affirmed their uneasy alliance which, would remain in affect for another three years.

The Soviet Union had been fighting with Germany for nearly six months when the US approached them to join the Allies in the pacific theater on December 8, 1941, one day after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. On December 11, the then newly appointed Soviet ambassador Maxim Litvinov gave the official response to America's request to set up bases on the USSR's pacific coast. The Soviet Union at that time, with its current war with Germany, saw allying on the pacific front and opening itself up to an attack by Japan as too risky.<sup>18</sup> Yet although the Soviet Union was holding diplomatic distance from entering the pacific war, it, like Japan, kept a sizeable number of troops into the hundreds of thousands on the border between the two now neutral nations. As the years and both wars advanced, the Allies broached the possible Soviet entry into the pacific war on several occasions. At the conference of Teheran in late November 1943, Stalin made one of the Soviet Union's initial promises of entry into the pacific war, but under the condition that Germany must be defeated beforehand.<sup>19</sup> This promise is again repeated in October 1944- this time with the added time-frame of two to three months following Germany's defeat. This continued in December of that year when Stalin met with the American ambassador, Averill Harriman and discussed the potential gains the USSR would receive if entered into the

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<sup>17</sup> Lensen 35

<sup>18</sup> Zimonin, Viacheslav. "Teheran-Yalta-Potsdam: Soviet Entry into the War with Japan." *Far Eastern Affairs*. No.2 1995. pg. 40.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 41

Pacific, namely the status quo Russia held before the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-05. These goals were reaffirmed at the Yalta convention in early February 1945 when the US met with both Britain and the USSR. Stalin once again brought up the two-to-three month entry date and a deal between the future allies was confirmed that if the Soviet Union did enter the war, they would retain the rights to the Southern half of Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, the Port of Dairen and Port Arthur as well as rights over the railway running through Manchuria. The Soviets settled their future entry into the war at Yalta, unbeknownst to its neutral neighbor.

Whether or not Stalin's statement of Japan as an "aggressor" in a speech on November 6, 1944<sup>20</sup> alerted Japanese officials of a deteriorating relationship, the nation held that the neutrality pact from 1941 continued "unblemished" even though both countries still fortified their borders between each other.<sup>21</sup> Yet on April 5, 1945, Foreign Minister Molotov read to Ambassador Sato this official statement which would be the first of many surprises to erupt between the two countries in the upcoming months. Molotov began by recounting the neutrality pact sealed between the Japan and the USSR four years earlier, and then read:

Since that time the situation has changed cardinally. Germany has attacked the USSR, while Japan, an ally of Germany, is helping the latter in her war against the USSR. Besides this, Japan is waging war against the United States and England, who are allies of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>20</sup> Coox 1061

<sup>21</sup> Although, as was between 1937-1939, there were still many (albeit minor in comparison to the likes of Nomonhan) border disputes as well as incidents of ships being targeted, boarded and even sunk in the waters between the two nations. A list of these offenses would later be drawn out by the USSR in justification of their refusal to renew the neutrality pact.

Under these circumstances the Neutrality Pact between the Soviet Union and Japan has lost its meaning and a prolongation of this Pact has become impossible.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the USSR denounces their pact with Japan one year prior to renewal, although technically in accordance to the original agreement, their neutrality would last until the appointed spring of 1946. From this point on though, and one month before the end of the war in Europe, the Soviet Union began deploying troops to the eastern front. From April to August of that year, nearly half a million troops were moved from the western front to the borders between the USSR and Manchukuo.<sup>23</sup> By August, there were over 1,600,000 Soviet troops with 5000 aircraft and 4000 tanks set up at the borders.<sup>24</sup> Actual dates given for the Soviet entry fluctuated from Stalin's report in May of an August 8 entry, then June's report of either a late July or mid-August date, and later Molotov's release on July 10, a week before the Potsdam conference, that the Soviet army would most likely attack in late August.<sup>25</sup> The fact of the matter here was that what was for years technically frozen or neutralized, meaning the standoff between Japan and the Soviet Union, was in comparison very quickly dissolving into war. The main issue is that for two sides that were wary of each other for so long, only one side was really prepared for action.

Coinciding with the Soviet Union's announcement of their relinquishing of the neutrality pact, April 5 saw in Japan the dissolving of one cabinet and the

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<sup>22</sup> Lensen 128

<sup>23</sup> Holloway, David. *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy: 1939-1956*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. pg. 124.

<sup>24</sup> Stephan, John J. *The Russian Far East: A History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. pg. 241.

<sup>25</sup> Holloway 124

creation of another.<sup>26</sup> With the precise timing of the cabinet dissolving and the fact that Premier Koiso revealed his intentions of leaving the previous day, the government rearrangement was in response to a number of issues, mainly internal conflict as well as the beginning of the US invasion of Okinawa. From April 5 and until the end of the war, the cabinet would then be under the newly appointed Premier Kantaro Suzuki. Although cabinet reshuffling was not an alien action for Japan during the inter-war period, the goals the government was pushing forth were slowly altering. The Soviet Union's role in these war goals were part of this alteration. Japan, until August 1945, partly clung to the myth that the neutrality pact, nulled in April, still had a grace period of one year. Therefore any attack from the USSR would not occur until the following spring, and the possibility of future negotiations with the Soviet Union were still open to discussion within the Japanese government itself.<sup>27</sup>

Following the surrender of Germany to the allies, a conference was set up for the heads of the Japanese government over May 11, 12, and 14 to mainly discuss how the end of the European war will affect their own campaign as well as any involvement of the Soviet Union and the possibility of negotiating a peace treaty to end the war. Part of the conference's summary of points was written up as:

...it is absolutely necessary, regardless of how the war against Britain and America may develop, that our Empire make supreme efforts to prevent the USSR from participating in the war against us

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<sup>26</sup> Butow, Robert J. C. *Japan's Decision to Surrender*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954 pg. 63-64.

<sup>27</sup> This myth was partly pushed forth by Molotov, who in late April reassured the one year grace period. Stephan 240.

because this will be a fatal blow to our empire at a time we are fighting so desperately against Britain and America.<sup>28</sup>

Further additions included reestablishing a benevolent neutrality between the two nations as well as seeking the Soviets' aid in possibly mediating peace. Part of the strategy here was not simply seeking a possible alternative to continuing the war, but with the European theater now closed, Japan was both seeking a new neutrality with the Soviet Union as well as there were some who saw possibly an ally against the US and Britain. Foreign Minister Togo relayed his wariness of dealing with the USSR in a post-war recount, but that the Supreme Council's was favoring a decision of seeking the "good offices" of the USSR for future mediation in negotiations with the allies, if not simply to bargain for much needed goods like oil.<sup>29</sup>

Talk of concessions with the Soviet Union to either become an ally or remain neutral started back in September of 1944 with a draft of possible diplomatic measures drawn up by then Foreign Minister, Mamoru Shigemitsu. Concessions then included what the Soviet Union would eventually negotiate from the allies at Yalta- the Kurile Islands, the Southern half of Sakhalin, railway rights through Mongolia and Manchuria, but also the added note from Shigemitsu that Japan should be prepared to do "whatever other sacrifices were necessary to ensure success" in these future negotiations.<sup>30</sup>

The "negotiations" for whichever outcome- alliance, neutrality, or peace, began in early June of 1945 between council appointed Koki Hirota and

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<sup>28</sup> Brooks 138.

<sup>29</sup> Butow 87

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 89

Ambassador Malik. An important factor along with this is that the negotiations, although minimal and scattered through the month, were kept in secret for fear of possible repercussions from those in the military or government who still saw the USSR as a direct threat. This secrecy would later lead to a major blow to the public in August when a Japanese newspaper would reveal both the failed negotiations and the Soviet entry into the war on the morning of August 10.

But the events in August were far away from those that June. Hirota met with Malik on several occasions, and expressed how fortunate it was that the two nations “never crossed swords” during WWII.<sup>31</sup> But Malik never responded to this and possible future dealings between the country outside of questions to clarify Japan’s intentions in the war and vague answers about the USSR’s own objectives. These negotiations never clearly called out for a possible neutrality or alliance and so Malik was able to easily delay responses, give non-committal answers, and brush off meetings to the growing consternation to Hirota and those in the Council who favored mediation. What would later be evident though was that this was the point. Stalin revealed to Truman at the Potsdam conference how the Soviet Union was “lulling” Japan into believing negotiations through the USSR were possible and thus maintaining the essence of surprise when the Soviets would enter the eastern front.

The Potsdam declaration, released on July 26, did not include the Soviet Union as one of the commanding voices for Japan’s unconditional surrender although Stalin and the USSR were prominent players at the conference itself. Due to the final disagreement in the conditions of the surrender, especially to

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<sup>31</sup> Lensen 135

how it related to the imperial system, the Japanese government chose to “remain silent” or ignore the declaration on July 28 which left the allies little choice in their minds on pressing forward with an attack.

By the Potsdam conference, which began the day after the successful test of the atomic bomb in New Mexico, the US's desire for the Soviet Union's entry had dwindled considerably since the Yalta conference five months earlier. Whether it was the fact that the US had now atomic capabilities or because the allies had little desire to see Asia split up between the powers like Europe was after Germany's surrender in May, the US was now both taking measures to hasten the pacific war's end while still trying to delay the Soviet's entry into it. One measure was to encourage Chang Kai-shek's government in China to postpone final negotiations with the USSR over the concessions agreed to at the Yalta conference since part of the stipulation for the Soviet entry was for China to agree to the terms set in February.<sup>32</sup> Even with the delay in negotiations with China, Stalin still assured Truman of Soviet participation in the pacific war at Potsdam. Whether this promise hastened the US's use of the bomb later that month can be debated, but the succeeding events in August would tie together the external conditions to convince the Japanese government to manipulate the final internal conflicts and accept the terms of surrender.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Holloway 125 (It is also important to point out here that although the Soviet entry was before negotiations with China were finalized, the post-surrender Sino-Chinese pact on August 26 stated that the Soviet Union and China did in fact reach an agreement on the Yalta terms before the August 8 announcement. How convenient. Butow 155.)

<sup>33</sup> It is important also to note that the US never discontinued the terms set at Yalta, but merely attempted encouraging delaying measures. This cautionary measure can be attributed to the US's uncertainty with how final its new weapon actually was. During the Potsdam conference, the USSR finally allowed the US to set up weather stations within Siberia to aid in ally reports for the possible invasion of Japan. Although the stations would not be staffed until after the surrender and then were used to aid in deployment of troops

This “double-dealing” by the Soviets between “lulling” Japan into believing there was possible space to negotiate and the promises to the allies to enter the war can be chastised, but also as they were attempting to bargain through the “good offices” of the USSR, the Japanese government was also taking steps to reorganize the quickly weakening military forces which included a restructuring of strategy for the Kuantung army. The army now set up across Manchukuo and Northern China was in no way the same shape as it was years earlier. The number of troops had been thinned down as more were sent off to help defend other parts of the pacific empire. Yet although their numbers were less, the concept of a possible war with the Soviet Union was still evident. Strategy had shifted from attacking the USSR borders to defending Japan’s in China. The Kuantung army’s plans though were flawed on a number of accounts. One: their calculation of what the Soviets had in troops, transport and ammunition were a vast underestimation. An example would be that on the western borders to the Soviet Union and Manchukuo, the Kuantung army calculated that the Soviets had 18 rifle divisions and one tank division when in reality, the Soviets had stationed 30 rifle divisions, 5 cavalry divisions, 4 armor divisions and 10 tank brigades.<sup>34</sup> Two: one can consider the policy of “wishful thinking” was also authorized by the army since a number of factors were considered necessary before the Soviets would invade.

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for occupation, the setting where the agreement was finalized at Potsdam was still under the reasoning that invasion was still a possibility and Soviet involvement was thus necessary. Yoder, Jr. H. S. *Planned Invasion of Japan: The Siberian Weather Advantage*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997. pg. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Drea, Edward J. “Missing Intentions: Japanese Intelligence and the Soviet Invasion of Manchuria, 1945.” *Military Affairs*. Volume 48, Issue 2, April 1984. pg. 69.

- US would have to physically invade Japan before the USSR would enter the war.
- The nulling of the neutrality pact in April still allowed a grace period until spring of 1946 before an invasion would occur.
- The war with Germany would have been overtaxing for the Soviets to immediately act against Japan after the European war ended.
- The harsh winters and the cost of transferring troops would make any initiative difficult to enact that year. The earliest projection of a Soviet assault was for Fall 1945 with most thinking that it would be after the winter that the USSR would attack.

With these factors considered, signs that would normally alert the nation to future conflict were not taken as seriously. The Soviet Union recalled all of its embassy staff and their families from Japan on July 24.<sup>35</sup> Transport of Soviet troops and supplies were noted through early August, with border incidents increasing over August 5 and 6, but still the August 8 announcement followed by military crossing late that evening still caught the army by surprise. When the announcement was delivered, parts of the army were in the second day of a five day war game scenario and on the evening of the 8, both Lieutenant General Iida and Kwantung Army Commander Yamada were away from the front participating in different ceremonies.<sup>36</sup> The extent of surprise and state of unpreparedness that characterized the Kwantung army that August was symbolized well with one soldier's query when the Soviets attacked his division following the USSR's entry into the war. Unfamiliar with details like Soviet army uniform style and transport design, one officer asked why "Americans were bombing his sector."<sup>37</sup> So

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<sup>35</sup> Drea 68

<sup>36</sup> Coox 1067

<sup>37</sup> Drea 69

although the Kuantung army still considered the Soviet Union a threat up until its surprise entry, the army itself, partly due to miscalculation and partly due to wishful thinking, was caught grossly unprepared.

The following events in August that led up to the Japanese government's eventual acceptance of the unconditional surrender terms initially sanctioned at Potsdam weeks earlier caused such internal conflict partly because of their magnitude, but also partly due to the fact that news and clear understanding of the events and their repercussions were not felt immediately. The atomic attack on Hiroshima in the early morning of August 6 was indeed shocking but the continuing clashing cabinet in Tokyo were very distant from the attack that leveled a city in a flashing second. Some even argued that the US would in no way have enough radioactive material for more of such bombs thus a similar attack was less likely to occur.<sup>38</sup> Foreign Minister Togo attempted in an emergency cabinet meeting on August 7 to use the new and ultimately destructive atomic power that America had just demonstrated as a tool to finally accept the terms set at Potsdam, but the Army officials countered back with arguments that the evidence streaming in was not yet conclusive and an investigation was necessary in order to come to such a conclusion. So as the remains of yet another city burned, the inner council in Tokyo still had not come to a decision.

Stalin signed the official government papers to enter the USSR on the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>, one day following the atomic attack on Hiroshima. Molotov

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<sup>38</sup> Frank, Richard B. *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*. Penguin Books Ltd. 1999. pg. 271.

read the declaration of war to Ambassador Sato in Moscow on the night of 8<sup>th</sup>. The is the events following this declaration that finally lead the Japanese government to realize that what period of grace they thought existed had just evaporated. Russia's statement of war read as:

After the defeat and surrender of Hitlerite Germany, Japan became the only great power that still stood for the continuation of the war...Loyal to the Allied duty, the Soviet Government accepted the proposal of the Allies and has joined in the declaration of the Allied powers of July 26...the Soviet Government from tomorrow, that is August 9, the Soviet Government will consider itself to be at war with Japan.<sup>39</sup>

Sato's actual telegram of the announcement, although delivered to the telegraph office in Moscow, never reached Tokyo, and hours after the meeting, the Soviet army crossed the border and invaded Manchukuo on the early morning of August 9, 1945. It was not until 4am, when the Domei news radio operator in Tokyo who was listening to a Moscow broadcast deciphered that Russia had not only declared war but had attacked Japanese troops.<sup>40</sup> What followed that morning was not only the coming together of the cabinet for another emergency meeting, but also the second Atomic attack on the city of Nagasaki.

Hours before the allies struck Nagasaki, Togo was at Premier Suzuki's house calling for the cabinet, whose meeting had been delayed the day before, to gather immediately. Togo recounted later that he visited Suzuki's house, which was in ruins from another B-29 attack, to remind him not just about gathering the cabinet but also that, "now more then ever, that a decision must be

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<sup>39</sup> Lensen 151-152

<sup>40</sup> Brooks 14

made to terminate the war immediately.”<sup>41</sup> To confirm, Suzuki called up Lieutenant General Ikeda who had returned from the Manchurian front only three weeks earlier.

Suzuki: Is the Kuangtung Army capable of repulsing the Soviet advance?

Ikeda: The Kuangtung Army is hopeless. Within two weeks, Changchu [a key city in central Manchukuo] will be occupied.

Suzuki: Is the Kuantung Army that weak? Then the game is up.<sup>42</sup>

This conversation is recounted by Ikeda after the war, but whether Suzuki really thought Japan's empire was now over, he would waffle back and forth in the following days between the disputing sides that voted for peace and to fight to the bitter end.

10:30am, August 9, thirty minutes before the Nagasaki attack, the Supreme Council finally gathered together and Suzuki opened up the meeting by stating that both the Hiroshima attack and the Soviet entry made any further advancement in the war “virtually impossible.” Suzuki concluded that he believed now was the time to agree to the terms of the Potsdam declaration and the floor was open to discussion.<sup>43</sup> His statement was met with silence. Finally, Admiral Yonai broke the quiet by stating simply, “We can't get anywhere by being silent forever.”<sup>44</sup> And once again, the council opened up to debate the future of the empire. The Soviet entry on top of the atomic attack was a blow that some, like Army Minister Anami, were not surprised at and only saw as the “inevitable”

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>43</sup> *Japan's Longest Day*. The Pacific War Research Society, Editors. Kodansha International Ltd. 1968. pg. 24.

<sup>44</sup> Frank 290

finally occurring, but others, including Anami's subordinate, Lieutenant General Kawabe reported that:

The Russian entry was a great shock when it came, whereas the atom bomb impact was not so readily apparent. Since Tokyo was not directly affected by the bombing, the full force of the shock was not felt...but reports reaching Tokyo described the Russian forces as "invading in swarms." It gave us all the more severe shock and alarm because we had been in constant fear of it with a vivid imagination that the "vast Red army forces in Europe were now being turned against us."<sup>45</sup>

Reports of the attack on Nagasaki that morning interrupted the meeting but did not in fact stop the debate between the two conflicting sides. Part of the issue is once again the accuracy of the news delivered. Nagasaki's mayor originally downplayed the impact of the second atomic bomb, lessening for the time being the initial fear of the allies weapon capabilities, and the debate continued until finally it is the Emperor's own somber announcement of "ending the war is the only way to restore world peace and to relieve the nation from the terrible distress with which it is burdened," that finally drew the Japanese government into the closing lap of the war.<sup>46</sup>

The morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> saw not only the attack of Nagasaki in the papers, but also the public announcement of the Soviet entrance into the war, along with the released fact from a Moscow broadcast that the Japanese government had attempted and failed with peace negotiations to end the war two months prior.

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<sup>45</sup> Brooks 18 (This fear of the Red army though conflicts with Kawabe's actions later that day to push forth declaring martial law on Japan and have the military officially take over the government to ride out the rest of the war. (Frank 288-289) but it also coincides with the dread that was building as reports were trickling in on the Soviet progress through Manchuria without even an official declaration of war reaching the capital.

<sup>46</sup> Butow 175

With US B-29's still dropping both bombs and leaflets in order to stir up the public, the Supreme Council tackled the following days and the release of the acceptance of the allies surrender terms with cautious steps, towards the US and also in an attempt to avoid an inner coup from the military. On August 12, three days before the final surrender announcement would be played out on national radio in Japan, Yonai spoke to Admiral Sokichi Takagi that, "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. This way we don't have to say we quit the war due to domestic circumstances."<sup>47</sup> The last days of the war were then settled as the Japanese government along with the allied forces discussed the final term of preserving the emperor's place in Japan.

Meanwhile back on the continent; the Soviet army continued to make quick work through Manchukuo, crossing nearly 100 kilometers a day and by the 13<sup>th</sup>, four days after entry, seizing most of Northern Manchuria. The initial end to the fighting was not announced until August 18, three days after the radio broadcast in Japan, but the Russian army continued to move forward to take back what it considered theirs, "liberating" the other half of Sakhalin and the Kuriles. If Truman had not taken a direct stand against it, Stalin would have moved forward with his initial August 23 plan of landing on Hokkaido.<sup>48</sup>

The Soviet entry into the war aided in finally closing the pacific theater for the Japanese, but it also was a stimulus for the US to speed up the end of negotiations on its own side. In his response to the Japanese government

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<sup>47</sup> Bix 512

<sup>48</sup> Frank 324.

acceptance and clarification of surrender terms on August 11, Secretary of State

James Byrnes wrote:

From the moment of surrender, 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.<sup>49</sup>

Byrnes' careful wording may have touched some nerves within the Japanese government due to the fact that after surrender, the Supreme Commander would have a higher authority than their own emperor, but from the American view, the note is also clearly stating that it is the US and not the allies as a whole that will be taken on the task of deeming what is "proper" for Japan. By specifying Supreme Commander as opposed to Supreme Command, the US can firmly grasp the Japanese occupation while still under the auspices of Allied negotiations. The motive would be the same as the US's desire to delay the initial Soviet entry into the war. The more control the US has, the less it is leaving to chance for the USSR to claim along with their appointed concessions from Yalta.

By examining the Soviet Union's history of foreign relations with the Japanese government through the 1930s and 1940s, one can come to a better understanding why the eventual entry of the USSR had an impact on the Japanese government even when the news of the Soviet attacks and intentions were unclear at that time. The sometime-careful, sometimes-stumbling diplomatic moves between the two countries during these fifteen years reveal a very tense and uneasy relationship that finally erupts in official war in August,

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<sup>49</sup> Butow 191

1945. The failure at Chengkufeng, and Nomonhan were signs that even the Kuantung army, considered at one time one of Japan's finest military forces, was still no match for its Soviet opponent. The USSR joining with the Allies at Potsdam was in essence a repeat of the embarrassing surprise of the Soviet-Germany pact in 1939. By underestimating its northern neighbor, and deluding itself in following false hopes that the Soviet Union would both mediate as well as follow through to the end of the neutrality pact, Japan once again placed itself in a position of either to surrender for the common good, or face an combination of enemies to big to overcome.<sup>50</sup>

It is the buildup before and during the war as well as the fool-me-twice surprise of the Soviets already dealing with the Allies that caused responses like Togo's and Kawabe's after news release of the Soviet entry into the war. And as Yonai had stated, the atomic attacks along with the Soviet entry finally were the right combination for those in the internal cabinet seeking to end the to finally seize control with the aid of the final word of the Emperor.

And so although the Soviet Union did in fact attempt to run with its campaign all the way to Hokkaido, its ultimate contribution to reaching the end of the war cannot be discounted, just as the atomic weapons and the continued raids by the B29 bombers over the last week of the war also had a major impact. Together, the Allies, including the late-comer USSR, physically and

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<sup>50</sup> Added together with this was the psychological effect that the Allies created with the continued bomber raids, the two atomic attacks, and the surprise entry of the USSR. In those weeks in August, the Japanese government came to a painful realization that it was unmatched technologically and militarily, and that with every day passing grew the possibility of another flashing second or the reality that its neutral northern neighbor had crossed onto its own shores.

psychologically isolated Japan in a way where it would have to come to the terms of the surrender internally with the final understanding that there was no side still left defensible. Then, through the final diplomatic measures between the Allies and Japan, the Pacific theater came to a close at last.

## Biographical Essay

Even if it was simply for a clarification of a casualty number at the battle of Nomonhan or on the arrival of strategic weather stations on Siberian soil, every source below contributed somehow in trying to understand the where the Soviet entry in the war fit in building the “surrender box” that would eventually isolate Japan into focusing on how to internally end the war.

Frank's *Downfall* offers one of the most dense and well-developed historic retellings offered I think today. Anyone who wants a better understanding of the pacific war and especially how it ends should look at it. But along with that, Butow's and Brooks' works both offer a good close look to the decision that came out of the last days of the war, and the Pacific Research Society's *The Longest Day* is a very interesting look at the last day of the war although for this paper, not much utilized since the Soviet impact is mostly felt within Japan before the 15<sup>th</sup>. Lensen's piece was a huge contribution since its main focus is on the “strange” or rather temporary neutrality that existed between Japan and the USSR for four years. The edited anthology, *Deterrent Diplomacy* also offers much more than essay and appendix information that I focused on, but also contains translated Japanese essays on the Anti-Comintern and Tripartite pact

Details to better understand the Russian perspective for this were taken from both the two articles from the *Far Eastern Report*, although Zimonin would definitely fall into the “Soviet-entry was the final lynch-pin” camp of Soviet historical thought. Stephan's book offers a good balanced view of the Russian's dealings with the far east and anyone looking for a broader look at the USSR's impact on east Asia should check it out.

Bix's book, although only used a little here is colossal and certainly does the job of exploring the man who is the Voice of the Crane, although probably the work that I came away most impressed with was Coox's two volume magna opus. For anyone wishing to explore further the Soviet Japanese history leading up through the 1930's, he also has a book specifically about the 1938 Chenkufeng incident. Young's piece also on the 1939 "incident" provides a more condensed argument for those searching. Yoder's book I only utilized in a footnote, but his work on the weather stations was very interesting, although they only lasted until December 1945, when finally the Soviets shut them down.

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## The Surrender Box

To gain a better understanding of why Japan agreed to the terms of the Potsdam declaration, one may have to adopt a rather “neo-orthodox” view in order to encompass the different histories, fronts, and perspectives that come out from WWII. And so, to understand why the “surrender box” eventually was sealed, one would have to actually look outside of one’s own orthodox thinking to see the different sides of the story.

### 1 - Japan – July 1945

Ready for peace or silent until better offers are brought to the table?



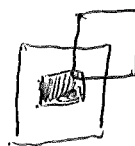
### 2 -The Potsdam Proclamation

Attempt by the Allies to “box” Japan into accepting the terms to Unconditional surrender. Ultimately Unsuccessful.



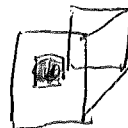
### 3 - The Atomic bombs attack

New and powerful threat is unleashed twice, revealing an awesome potential



### 4 – The continued B29 attack

Successfully burning cities the “Traditional” way



### 5 – The Soviet Entry

Revealing there is no more sides to turn to, all fronts are covered.

