

CHAPTER 4: WHY JAPAN COULD NOT IMPLEMENT MASTER PLAN

In Chapters 2 and 3 I showed how the Japanese had a good chance of winning the war if they adhered to the Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of War Against the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek.

The next question I would like to address is why, instead of being guided by the Draft Proposal, they veered far from it and ended up suffering an ignominious defeat. The most meticulous examination of the strategies in the Draft Proposal fails to yield even the faintest suggestion of engagements such as the Battle of Midway (considered the first step on the road to defeat, in which Japan lost four aircraft carriers) or the New Guinea campaign.

Midway operation

Nor do we find in the master plan (the Draft Proposal) language instructing the Japanese to head for Midway Atoll and from there, attack and destroy American aircraft carriers. As a matter of fact, occupying Midway Atoll was emphatically not in keeping with the policies in the Draft Proposal.

I often hear comments like, “Remember the Doolittle Raid?¹ To stave off such attacks we needed to shut down Midway, the advance base for attacks on Japan.” The Doolittle Raid did take the Japanese by surprise, but it was merely a clever scheme, a suicide attack that could be executed only once.

The Americans launched 16 B-25 long-range bombers from the *USS Hornet* 500 nautical miles (900 kilometers) away from Japan, and proceeded to bomb Tokyo and other key cities. Surveillance systems detected the planes early on, but there was no emergency response system in place. The Japanese were shocked by the attack, which they were completely unable to repel.

However, in my opinion, no one who called himself a professional soldier should have been surprised. If the Japanese had had better surveillance and response systems, the Americans could not have protected two aircraft carriers with the defensive aircraft on the *USS Enterprise* once they were within 500 nautical miles from Japan. The two carriers would have been sitting ducks.

In other words, the Doolittle Raid was a surprise attack; a repetition could not have been successful.

And indeed, the Americans did not attempt to repeat this foolish assault. Therefore, shock or no shock, there was no need to contravene the strategies outlined in the Draft Proposal and attempt an attack on Midway. I am reminded of the sumo wrestler’s trick of clapping his hands in front of his opponent’s face, hoping he will be so surprised that he loses his concentration. Only a rank

¹ The Doolittle Raid occurred on April 19, 1942. The US Army Air Force launched B-25 bombers from aircraft carriers, which dropped bombs on Tokyo, Yokosuka, Yokohama, Nagoya, Kobe, and other cities. The attacks killed 87 Japanese. Three bombers were lost; the others made emergency landings on Chinese soil and were abandoned.

amateur would fall for such a ruse.

Deployment of troops to New Guinea

Japanese military authorities deployed a total of 160,000 soldiers to New Guinea; only 10,000 men survived their ordeal there. To make matters worse, more than 100,000 of the 150,000 who did not return died of starvation. It was a repetition of the tragedy in Guadalcanal, but larger in scale. In Chapter 3 (I.2) I explained that these tragedies occurred because the Japanese violated a principle of battle: war potential is inversely proportional to the square of the distance from base to battle site. Because of the impossibility of delivering supplies, the target must not exceed the terminal offensive point. Moreover, New Guinea could not be considered a strategically important point as a stronghold. It was unthinkable in the context of the strategies hypothesized in the Draft Proposal. The aforementioned Professor Woods describes the situation as follows.

The move to the south also took Japanese forces to some of the most rugged and isolated places in the world. East of the Indies and within ten degrees of the equator, this enormous territory consisted entirely of impenetrable landmasses, disease-ridden coasts, and tiny and widely separated atolls and islands of the tropical sea. The area contained only small and primitive human populations, no large settlements, no developed facilities, and precious few natural resources. Every bullet, can of food, pound of rice, roll of barbed wire, and drop of oil used by Japanese forces would have to come from within the empire along extraordinarily long lines of communication.²

In that case why was such a huge number of Japanese military personnel transported to such places? I shall address this question in due course.

Did Japan's leaders fail to understand the Draft Proposal?

Did the leaders of the Army and Navy willfully disregard the Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of War Against the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek, which had been officially adopted at a Liaison Conference between Imperial General Headquarters and the Imperial Government held right before war broke out?

In February and March of 1942, a time when Phase 1 operations were proceeding smoothly, a heated debate was exchanged between Army and Navy staff officers concerning Phase 2 operations. Members of the operations sections of the Army and Navy ranking section chief and below had assembled for a joint research session. The positions put forth by the Army and Navy were, in substance, as follows:

- The Army's viewpoint: Bring about the downfall of England, which is the objective of the Western Asia operations. Use political strategy to achieve the surrender of China without outside help. Avoid launching major operations in outlying areas; instead, concentrate on making occupied areas invincible.

² Wood, *op. cit.*, 25.

- The Navy's viewpoint: Launch aggressive operations aimed at crushing the main strength of the US Navy and attacking the enemy's advance bases. Attack Australia, one of those advance bases.

It seems strange to me that Australia was perceived as one of the enemy's major advance bases. Nevertheless, that is how the Navy viewed it at the time. They were offering a compromise when they agreed to initiate the FS (Fiji-Samoa) and MO (Port Moresby) operations. What is astonishing is the fact that the Navy's viewpoint, i.e., advancing into the South Pacific, was established at that early stage of the war. No matter how one looks at it, the Navy made a recommendation that strayed completely from the portion of the Draft Proposal that reads "Using any and all means, we shall endeavor to lure the main strength of American naval vessels in a timely manner to an appropriate location, where we shall attack and destroy it."

I cannot help thinking that Army staff officers failed to realize how important the Draft Proposal was. Remember, its strategies were the only ones that would enable Japan to win the war. Looking at the situation in the long term, a Japanese victory (since Japan had far less economic strength and war potential than its opponents) depended on adherence to the Draft Proposal. Still, these facts appear not to have penetrated the minds of Army authorities. And it does seem as though naval authorities totally ignored the Draft Proposal.

Did Commander Yamamoto understand the Draft Proposal when he attacked Ceylon?

But between February 20 and 23 the Combined Fleet Headquarters conducted a map exercise on board the battleship *Yamato* in which an attack targeting Ceylon was launched in the Indian Ocean. Members of the Naval General Staff were present, as were three observers from Army General Staff Headquarters, who had been invited. The members of the Staff Headquarters apparently objected to the assault, stating that it should be not be initiated until Germany had made more progress with its Africa operation, and the subjugation of Burma was complete. The Naval General Staff officers did not voice their opinions. But on February 27 at a joint Army-Navy research conference, they communicated their disapproval of the Ceylon operation.

It seems as though the Headquarters of the Combined Fleet understood the Draft Proposal, while the Naval General Staff did not. I say this because the Combined Fleet embarked on the Ceylon operation on April 5, despite the fact that Headquarters had rejected it. That operation succeeded in sinking two heavy cruisers, as well as the *HMS Hermes*, a light aircraft carrier. At about the same time the Kondo Fleet, based in Penang and commanded by Adm. Kondo Nobutake, set out accompanied by seven submarines; during a daring, destructive encounter in the Bay of Bengal, it sank 28 merchant ships. These operations should have continued, based on the original strategy, but that was not to be. As stated earlier, on April 10 Commander Yamamoto ordered the Nagumo Fleet to return to Japan so that it could take part in the Midway operation.

After the Pearl Harbor strike Yamamoto had ordered Combined Fleet Chief of Staff Ugaki Matome to investigate subsequent operation plans. They involved attacks on Midway, Johnston Atoll, Palmyra Atoll, and Hawaii. Yamamoto also recommended that the first attack should target Ceylon, an important enemy base, while there was still time to spare (the aforementioned Ceylon operation).

Since in April Burma was not fully under Japanese control, the Navy could not count on help from the Army. Without that, the Navy would only be displaying their war potential — showing their hands to the enemy.

The Midway operation could never have appeared in the Draft Proposal. The only conclusion that occurs to me is that Navy officials did not understand the true objective of the Western Asia operation.

Guidelines To Be Followed in the Next Stage of the War (Phase 2 operations, March 7)

On March 7, 1942, a liaison conference between Imperial General Headquarters and the Japanese government was held. Those present made formal decisions about a document entitled “Guidelines To Be Followed in the Next Stage of the War.” They were as follows:

1. To cause Great Britain to surrender, and the US to lose the will to engage in further warfare, we shall build upon our military gains, and while readying our long-term, invincible offensive stance, take decisive action at the first opportunity.
2. Protecting occupied territories and important communication routes all the while, we shall encourage the exploitation and usage of critical resources for national defense, and endeavor to secure self-sufficiency and increase our national war potential.
3. We shall make decisions relating to still more assertive war strategy, taking into consideration our national strength, the status of our operations, the war between Germany and the USSR, US-USSR relations, and developments in Chongqing.
4. Our policy toward the USSR shall be informed by the Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of War Against the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek issued on November 15, 1941 as well as “Measures Intended To Accompany Developments in the War Situation,” adopted on January 10, 1942. However, given the current state of affairs, we shall not participate in mediating a peace between Germany and the USSR.
5. Our policy toward Chungking shall be governed by “Efforts to Force Chungking to Surrender in Connection with Developments in the War Situation,” adopted on December 24, 1941.
6. Cooperation with Germany and Italy shall be guided by the essentials outlined in the Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of War Against the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek issued on November 15, 1941.

In the first item, put forward by the Army, “We shall build upon our military gains, and while readying our long-term, invincible offensive stance” had replaced “We shall extend our military gains,” proposed by the Navy. Appended to the same item was, “(We shall) take decisive action at the first opportunity.”

Staff officers had already agreed to proceed with the Fiji-Samoa operation and the attack on Port Moresby, and their decisions had been put in writing. It is likely that the aforementioned revisions were made to rationalize agreement among staff officers. Furthermore, the Draft Proposal was ostensibly valued; it was neither ignored nor rejected. But it had certainly been watered down by this stage of the war.

Prime Minister Tojo reportedly found fault with the Draft Proposal, saying that he couldn't tell if it proposed offensive or defensive strategies. Though he served concurrently as Minister of War, at that time he lacked the authority of the supreme command, which was held by the Chief of the General Staff (Army) and the Chief of the Naval General Staff. Therefore, Tojo could not overrule the staff officers. But formally the guidelines were signed by Prime Minister Tojo, Sugiyama Hajime, chief of the General Staff, and Nagano Osami, chief of the Naval General Staff.

There are some who maintain that Prime Minister Tojo was a dictator, but they are completely mistaken. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, and Chiang Kai-shek had total control over their nations' armed forces, so the description would certainly apply to them, but not to Tojo.

Tojo (now a general) made the following comment on February 16, 1945, after he had resigned as prime minister to Col. Tanemura Sako, a staff officer:

I overestimated the capabilities of our Navy, but allowed them to lead me around by the nose. I was wrong about the offensive terminal point; we should have focused on the Indian Ocean.
— Gen. Tojo Hideki³

One can almost sense his pain. Judging from his bitter reaction, Gen. Tojo must have captured the essence of the Draft Proposal.

Let us take a look at the occupation of Rabaul during the first-phase operations. On January 23 the South Seas Detachment (an Army unit), attached to the 4th Fleet, captured Rabaul. After that mission was accomplished, they were supposed to withdraw, leaving a naval land force in charge. But persuaded by an appeal from the Navy, they remained on Rabaul.

Prime Minister Tojo was vehemently opposed to this decision, fearing that it would lead to an extension of the war front. His view was supported by Deputy Chief of Staff Tsukada Osamu. But both men ended up giving in to pressure from the Navy, and its promise of assistance of a naval air squad in the assault on Singapore. Even this compromise demonstrates the prime minister's strategic perspective and his profound understanding of the Draft Proposal.

³ Tanemura Sako, *Daihon'ei kimitsu nisshi* (Confidential diary of Imperial General Headquarters) (Tokyo: Daiyamondo Sha, 1952), 263 and Gunjishi Gakkai, ed. (The military history society of Japan), *Dai hon'ei rikugunbu senso shido han: kimitsu senso nisshi* (Confidential war diaries of War Guidance Section, Imperial General Headquarters) (Tokyo: Kinseisha, 1998), vol. 2.

Because of the advance into and fortification of Rabaul, it is probably safe to say that the Port Moresby operation, the objective of which was the occupation of the air force base on the Australian side of New Guinea, was decided upon at the February Army-Navy Staff Officers' Joint Conference. The assault on Rabaul was a turning point: the first step in a series of reckless undertakings.

One can't help but wonder what would have happened had the Army General Staff Headquarters and the Prime Minister tried just a little harder to stop the invasion of Rabaul.

IGHQ chief senses a crisis

In entries in his war diary dated March 8 and 10, Lt. Gen. Tanaka Shin'ichi, head of Section 1 (Operations Section) of the Headquarters of the General Staff, describes his foreboding, his sense that the decision made on March 7 might lead to a "dreadful crossroads in the war."

March 8: We may reach a dreadful crossroads in the war. I fear that the Navy's offensive operations in the Pacific will become the driving force behind our actions.

March 10: Aggressive operations in the Pacific will shake the foundation of our efforts to increase national strength. The building of invincible readiness is of utmost importance. The Guandong Army's preparations remain incomplete.

I see no end to this war. Guidance for the Greater East Asian War stands at a crossroads at the end of each battle. We must open up a route between India and Western Asia.

After World War II ended, Lt. Gen. Tanaka wrote down his recollections as follows:

1. At the Liaison Conference between Imperial General Headquarters and the Imperial Government, held on March 7, ultimately ended in the adoption of "Guidelines To Be Followed in the Next Stage of the War" in the absence of true agreement between the Army and Navy.
2. The Army's position was the same as stated at the Liaison Conference held immediately prior to the outbreak of hostilities, i.e., to win this war, we must build an impregnable defense and prepare for a protracted war. To that end, we must refrain from dangerous, large-scale invasive operations in the Pacific. We must be equipped for crushing, large-scale enemy offensives that are likely to be launched after 1943. Also crucial is the protection of sea routes in the western Pacific. Additionally, priority must be given to encouraging, over the long term, the building of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.

Furthermore, during this time, they stated that they would endeavor to encourage the end to the war by placing emphasis on the Indian Ocean area, assisting with German and Italian operations, and when an opportunity presents itself, complete work on operations intended to open up a route between India and western Asia.

3. Navy officials asserted that all major operations in the Greater East Asian War should be

launched on the Pacific Ocean, and that since the road to ending the war rested entirely on causing the US to lose the will to wage war against Japan, they clung to the concept of early decisive battles. In any case, Japan would maintain its offensive stance, putting the enemy on the defensive. It was absolutely necessary to destroy the enemy's counteroffensive bases and cripple its initial response capabilities.

In other words, instead of using defensive strategy on the Pacific, as was expected prior to the outbreak of war, the Navy now wanted to go on the offensive. This would involve the conquest of Australia, the largest American base from which counteroffensives could be launched. It was also diametrically opposite the Army's defensive strategy, which was to establish a long-term, invincible politico-military stance.

4. The Army interpreted a portion of "Guidelines To Be Followed in the Next Stage of the War," i.e., (we shall) take decisive action at the first opportunity," as a tactical suggestion or an expression of enthusiasm for the operation. But the Navy obviously believed that the phrase included the intention to launch operations in Australia and Hawaii to crush the enemy's naval military strength and even to ruin its counteroffensive base. The subsequent Battle of Midway was clearly a result of this interpretation.⁴

Success at Pearl Harbor disrupted all plans

It is not at all surprising that both Prime Minister Tojo and Operations Section Chief Lt. Gen. Tanaka Shin'ichi were troubled by the decision to adopt "Guidelines To Be Followed in the Next Stage of the War" on March 7. But then, why were they unable to dissuade naval officials from promoting operations that deviated from the Draft Proposal, which laid out the only strategy that would place the Navy on the victorious side? Additionally, why did the Naval General Staff, which had previously adopted a defensive stance against the US (as outlined in the Draft Proposal) for their basic strategy, shift to a decisive-frontal-battle philosophy, which contradicted the Draft proposal?

It is my conviction that the change of direction can be traced directly to the dramatic success of the assault on Pearl Harbor, which was conducted even though there was great opposition to it, and which was masterminded by Yamamoto Isoroku, commander in chief of the Combined Fleet. It was the reason for a complete change in the Navy's approach. The Army, unable to resist, was dragged along by the Navy.

Yamamoto Isoroku had achieved godlike status. Of course, in a nation like Japan it would be unlikely for a dictator to be deified. In any case, Yamamoto did not become a dictator. Still, because he wielded so much influence, even high-ranking officers were loath to stand up to him. And even though the Naval General Staff was dead set against the Midway operation, they acquiesced when Yamamoto said he would resign if they failed to go through with it.

⁴ *Senshi Soshō* (War history series) 035 (Daihon'ei Rikugun bu 3) (Imperial General Headquarters, Army Division 3) [covers up to April 1942] (Tokyo: Asagumo Shinbunsha), 517-8.

There was one more misfortune that arose in connection with the Pearl Harbor success —victory disease. Prof. James Wood cites it as the primary reason for Japan’s defeat. It led to the following notion: “Now is the best time to confront the Americans head on! We will crush them. There is no need to worry about defense!” This mindset spread like wildfire and became entrenched. I agree with Prof. Wood; victory disease caused the Japanese to depart completely from their original, basic strategy.

Combined Fleet and Naval General Staff became equals

Commander Yamamoto’s forcefulness and victory disease combined to exert a tremendous influence on Operations officers in the Army General Staff as well. The Army General staff ended up agreeing to outrageous, expanded operations, such as the Port Moresby Operation, at a central liaison meeting, the result was the New Guinea tragedy.

As a matter of fact, the power Commander Yamamoto had acquired had begun to create strain and tension, even within the Navy. In the first place, supreme command of the Navy rested with the head of the Naval General Staff. That organization would draw up operation plans, and the Combined Fleet, which was responsible for acting on orders to execute those operations issued by the Naval General Staff, would fight battles. But perhaps readers have already noticed that the relationship between the Naval General Staff and the Combined Fleet had become an equal one.

Please refer to Figure 12. You will see that right around the end of a first-phase operation, the Naval General Staff and the Combined Fleet had differing concepts of that operation. Also, a time series analysis (the chronological order of events) tells us whether the Combined Fleet managed to push past resistance from the Naval General Staff.

The Combined Fleet planned the Hawaii assault early on; the Midway operation became a logical next step. The Naval General Staff was dead set against Midway, but Yamamoto, who bears responsibility for the crushing defeat there, was not disciplined in any way by the Naval General Staff. He would have been dismissed at the very least, and even punished severely, if this had happened in another nation. But by then Yamamoto had been put on a pedestal; the Naval General Staff had been paralyzed by his aura.

Figure 12: Disagreement between Combined Fleet and Naval General Staff about operation concepts at end of Phase 1 operations

Date	Combined Fleet	Naval General Staff
12/09/1941	Yamamoto Isoroku orders Naval General Staff to research operation plans for attacks on Hawaii and Ceylon	
01/14/1942	Ugaki Matome draws up plan for Hawaii attack; staff officers under Kuroshima Kameto draw up plan for Ceylon attack	
01/27-28/1942		Army-Navy High Command Conference on Blocking Communications Between the US and Australia; agreement between Army and Navy General staffs Capture of Eastern New Guinea and the Solomon Islands
01/29/1942		Order No. 47 from IGH*
02/09/1942	Decision made to attack Ceylon, then Hawaii	
02/20-23/1942	Map exercise of Ceylon attack commences	
02/16-27/1942		Conference involving all staff members ranking section chief or below in Army-Navy General Staff. Navy recommends shift from protracted war to offensive strategy. They compromise, settling on FS** and MO*** operations; they reject Combined Fleet's Ceylon attack operation
03/07/1942	Decision made to adopt "Guidelines To Be Followed in the Next Stage of the War" (offensive operations already decided upon)	
03/08/1942	Combined Fleet informed that Ceylon attack operation has been rejected	
3/27/1942	Japan-Germany-Italy Joint Expert Commission meets; Germany and Italy ask Japanese Navy to disrupt Allied communications on the Indian Ocean	
04/05-09/1942	Japanese attack Ceylon	
04/10/1942	Carrier battle group ordered to conclude Phase 1 operations in Indian Ocean	
05/08/1942	Naval battle fought in Coral Sea in connection with MO operation; MO operation ends in failure	Naval General Staff approves operation
06/05/1942	Crushing defeat in Battle of Midway	
06/21/1942	Rommel's forces in North Africa capture Tobruk (key British position)	
06/24/1942	4 th Fleet announces plan to reclaim base at Guadalcanal	
07/07/1942		Decision made to halt Operation FS and proceed with Port Moresby overland offensive
07/11/1942		Chiefs of Naval General Staff and Army General Staff report to Emperor about Indian Ocean operations
08/07/1942	<u>US troops storm Guadalcanal Island</u>	

*Imperial General Headquarters

**Fiji-Samoa

***Port Moresby

Pearl Harbor strike: tactical victory, strategic defeat

The huge victory at Pearl Harbor energized the Japanese people, relieved their pent-up frustration, and instilled them with a new confidence. But that same confidence brought on victory disease and its disastrous consequences.

A friend, Mr. Kuchiishi Osamu, has written about battles planned by Commander Yamamoto, or with which he had some involvement. He has rated each one from two viewpoints: tactical victory and strategic defeat. See Figure 13 for his evaluation of the Pearl Harbor strike.

Pearl Harbor was, without a doubt, a tactical victory, a magnificent one. But what we learned later is that although the Japanese did sink five battleships and half-destroyed one more, only two were decommissioned. The remainder were recovered and repaired.

Figure 13: Pearl Harbor Strike: A Tactical Victory and Strategic Defeat⁵

Objective	<p>To cause the US Navy and the American public to lose, once and for all, their determination to wage war against the Japanese.</p> <p>Commander Yamamoto made the decision to attack without consulting the government, the Army, or the Foreign Ministry; the Naval General Staff gave formal consent after the fact.</p>
Tactical victory	<p>The surprise attack was accomplished by six Japanese carriers; of eight targeted battleships, five were sunk (including one disabled ship), two were half-destroyed, and one slightly damaged.</p> <p>However, only two (the <i>Arizona</i> and the <i>Oklahoma</i>) had to be scrapped. The other six were recovered and repaired.</p>
Strategic defeat	<p>Commander Yamamoto's objective notwithstanding, he ended up fueling the American people's bellicosity to an alarming extent.</p> <p>Storage tanks holding 4.5 million barrels of fuel oil were undamaged, enabling the Americans to conduct several months' worth of operations.</p> <p>Naval shipyard facilities were undamaged: six battleships sunk by the Japanese were repaired and used in naval gunfire support. The aircraft carrier <i>Yorktown</i>, later severely damaged in the Battle of the Coral Sea, required emergency repairs.</p> <p>The carrier <i>Enterprise</i> was at sea nearby at the time of the attack. A second strike aimed at the <i>Enterprise</i> never took place, and her task force was safe.</p>

⁵ Kuchiishi Osamu, *Yamamoto Isoroku to teikoku kaigun (senjutsuteki shori to senryakuteki haiboku)* (Yamamoto Isoroku and the Japanese Imperial Navy: tactical victory and strategic defeat) (report submitted to Modern History Study Group).

Mr. Kuchiishi also explains how (and why) Pearl Harbor was a strategic defeat. Since the base's oil tanks and shipyard were unharmed, the Americans were able to recover and launch a counteroffensive after a brief hiatus. But more critical is the fact that the original objective (cause the US Navy and the American public to lose their determination to wage war against Japan) totally backfired on Yamamoto. Horrified by the attack and swayed by Roosevelt's cunning propaganda, the American people, 85% of whom had been opposed to war, were now up in arms, ready to "kill the Japs."

No insight gained from a visit to the US

Since Commander Yamamoto had spent some time in the US, he fancied himself a connoisseur of Americans, an illusion shared by his aides. In actuality, he never gained an understanding of Americans. He certainly didn't realize that they were not the sort of people to be cowed by an attack like Pearl Harbor.

On the contrary Americans are wont to embark on vendetta campaigns: Remember the Alamo! Remember the Maine!

Obviously (and unfortunately), Yamamoto was not aware of this aspect of the American mentality.

Some are of the opinion that the blame rests on those who delayed presenting the declaration of war, not on Yamamoto. But if he had been aware of the American mindset and the power of public opinion (opposed to war at first), he would not have waited until the last minute to declare war. He would have consulted with the Foreign Ministry to ensure that the declaration would not be delayed.

Others think that it was impossible to issue a declaration of war with plenty of notice because Pearl Harbor was a surprise attack. Then, instead of launching a surprise attack that was a gamble at best, why not just brazenly attack the Philippines? As I demonstrated with my simulation in Chapter 3, that would have resulted in a much more advantageous war situation for the Japanese.

In the aforementioned war diary penned by Lt. Gen. Tanaka Shin'ichi, the writer states that the Navy favored decisive battles because "the only hope of winning the war was causing the Americans to lose the will to fight the Japanese." The whole issue boils down to Commander Yamamoto's mistaken judgement about the Americans, which the Navy swallowed whole.

Did Yamamoto Isoroku spy for the Americans?

Yamamoto Isoroku kept pushing forward with his operations: Pearl Harbor, Midway, Guadalcanal, as if he was hoping Japan would be defeated. Or at least, we can make that claim on the basis of his results. There are more than a few people who suspect that he was an American agent.

Surprisingly, even Hayashi Chikatsu, the author of the ground-breaking *Outbreak of War Between Japan and the US*, writes, "Some believe that Yamamoto Isoroku spied for the Americans. This

writer has found no resources that would reject that accusation.⁶

It is important to remember that whether the subject at hand is Pearl Harbor or another operation, no one thought they were misguided.

In retrospect, however, we can surmise that those operations sealed Japan's defeat, but that was certainly not the prevailing mood then. The Japanese people were wildly enthusiastic about them.

Please allow me to digress for a moment and address the notion of espionage. It is my belief that people become spies for three reasons: (1) they are attracted by the promise of financial reward; (2) they are under duress of some sort (e.g., threats); and (3) they are motivated by reasons of conscience (ideology). Take the Sorge incident, which is a good example of (3). His informant Ozaki Hotsumi wanted Japan to fight an all-consuming war in China; then the USSR would deal the final blow, and then a revolution would ensue in defeated Japan. Ozaki himself admitted in court unashamedly that that was his plan. This was a strategy often used by the Comintern, which Ozaki embraced wholeheartedly.

Suspicious of espionage and conspiracies: signs of idiocy

First of all, Commander Yamamoto would never have spied for monetary gain, so we can eliminate (1). Also, the mere notion of his participating in activities that might lead to his falling victim to blackmailers is absolutely ridiculous. It is impossible to say that there was no chance whatsoever of his being caught up in something of the sort. But if we consider the social environment in those times, we realize that there was very little likelihood that someone of Yamamoto's rank would become a target.

Could he have been blackmailed into arranging for the Combined Fleet operations to fail? Yamamoto was not the only person involved in the operations, so we must reject this ridiculous accusation as well.

As for (3), Yamamoto as Comintern agent: another impossibility, given the prevailing ideological environment. Besides, there is no evidence to support this accusation.

Some may think he was a Freemason, which is a possibility. But Freemasonry gained popularity as a group of organizations that served as an international social club for upper-class men; quite a few Japanese notables were members. Freemasons did not adhere to a strict hierarchy or chain of command. In such an organization, schemes like those conceived by the Comintern would not be possible.

Are Yamamoto's detractors claiming that he became a fanatical adherent of Freemason thinking, and a spy in his determination to destroy Japan? There is no evidence that supports such an idiotic

⁶ Hayashi Chikatsu, *op. cit.*, 218.

accusation, so we must dismiss it.

The trouble with these spy and conspiracy accusations is that no one bothers to investigate them. The “theorists” simply make up their minds in a vacuum and pronounce Yamamoto guilty. No further thought; problem solved. This is suspension of disbelief (or more accurately, suspension of thought).

The real reason for Yamamoto’s failures

Yamamoto Isoroku is remembered today as an enlightened member of the Japanese Navy elite. He is also remembered as a pioneer who steered the Navy from its traditional big-ship, big-guns policy to one that gave precedence to aircraft.

It is very possible that Yamamoto had outstanding perception, tactical knowledge, and operational capability, as far as naval battles were concerned. But he had many failings when it came to strategic concepts.

Figure 13 shows that the Pearl Harbor attack was a tactical victory but a strategic defeat. However, Mr. Kuchiishi’s paper also analyzes 10 other operations in which Yamamoto was involved. He demonstrates that there were quite a few tactical victories, were a possibility, but the vast majority of them were strategic defeats.

Operation I-Go,⁷ conducted April 7-14, 1943, was the last operation overseen by Commander Yamamoto. It involved an air attack launched from Rabaul to Guadalcanal. His men used 190 aircraft from a land-based air unit and 160 landed from a carrier, for a total of 350 aircraft.

Normally an aircraft carrier is used to assemble planes at a location near a faraway enemy base. However, the strategy of landing planes from a carrier and using them together with land-based aircraft is extremely problematic. Though the pilots who would fly them possessed skills that ordinary pilots lacked, using them together was very wasteful. Later on there was a sharp decrease in the number of airmen who could fly from carriers.

Additionally, at the time Yamamoto had access to plenty of aircraft carriers; why didn’t he put them to use?

“Send 5 divisions to Guadalcanal all at once”

In *Why Did the Imperial Japanese Navy Suffer Defeat?* Navy General Staff officer Yoshida Toshio writes that on the occasion of the Battle of Guadalcanal, Commander Yamamoto Isoroku telegraphed the following report to Headquarters:

⁷ Operation I-Go was a Navy operation that took place April 7-15, 1943. It was an air attack executed by the 11th Air Fleet and carrier-based aircraft attached to the 3rd Fleet. Targets were Guadalcanal, Port Moresby (in southeast New Guinea), Oro Bay, and Milne Bay.

For the upcoming hostilities, the Army and Navy must sufficiently prepare their forces and their minds, just as they did in Phase 1 operations, and then confront the enemy.

*The Army must provide five elite divisions from the outset (italics mine).*⁸

Five divisions?! It does make sense to approach a battle with as much manpower as possible, but the Americans had landed only one division on Guadalcanal. And more is not always better. What was this nonsense Yamamoto was spewing like an irrational child? Did he even consult a map? Did Yamamoto believe that Guadalcanal was a strategic, critical location that would determine the course of the rest of the war? If so, he was a poorer strategist than I thought. His telegram reveals the astonishing truth for all to see.

Had anyone thought of the need for supplies?

In Chapter 3, I.2., to illustrate the principle “war potential is inversely proportional to the square of the distance from base to battle site,” I cite the Battle of Guadalcanal, explaining that the problem was one of supply and of exceeding the offensive terminal point.

The Japanese finally landed two divisions (30,000 men) at Guadalcanal, but very little in the way of heavy weapons or provisions. Consequently, 5,000 of those men were killed in action, but 15,000 starved to death. Ten thousand sailors managed to escape with their lives, but looked like wraiths when they were repatriated. This same principle tells us that the distance from Rabaul (1,000 kilometers) is prohibitive, when it comes to transport and the delivery of supplies within the enemy’s sphere of influence.

If Yamamoto had been even minimally aware of what is involved in supplying troops, he would have been aware of the difficulties involved in transporting five divisions to Guadalcanal Island. But whatever the case, his order specified landing five divisions there in one fell swoop. Transport and supply are strategic linchpins in a world war. But Commander Yamamoto was woefully ignorant in this respect.

And for that reason, the strategy employed during the attack on Midway Island comes to mind. If the Japanese had managed to occupy it, how would they have supplied their troops? It seems that they did not give much consideration to that aspect. Furthermore, they should have been thinking about how to prevent the enemy from receiving supplies. That apparently wasn’t part of the thought process, either. I don’t believe I’m exaggerating when I say that the only aspect of waging war in their minds was fighting battles.

Commander Yamamoto derailed Japan’s basic strategy not because he was a spy, but because his notions of strategy were flawed. And he wasn’t the only one; there were others in the Navy with the same deficiencies. The Navy was accustomed to loading all necessary supplies into a ship, fighting a battle, and then returning home. Perhaps it is not surprising that its leaders did not give the proper weight to the supply aspect of logistics. But it is hard to forgive their failure to realize

⁸ Yoshida Toshio, *Nihon teikoku kaigun wa naze yabureta ka* (Why did the Imperial Japanese Navy suffer defeat?) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1995).

that they may under no circumstances exceed the offensive terminal point.

Why did the Army defer to the Navy?

As stated earlier, on February 16 and 27 everyone in the Army and Navy Operations Sections in the Supreme Command ranking section chief or below participated in a joint research conference. Army personnel submitted their ideas for Phase 2 operations in accordance with the Draft Proposal, while Navy personnel favored head-on decisive battles designed to destroy the enemy's counteroffensive positions. The Navy's proposals were adopted in almost every case.

Those present agreed to attack the Port Moresby base on the Australian side of New Guinea, which was why the Army got mired in that bottomless swamp. The Guadalcanal defeat and the war of attrition were instigated by the Navy, but the Army had given its agreement on that. The Navy bore the bulk of the responsibility, though, because it had not given sufficient thought to the timing or the war situation; it simply proceeded to construct an air base on Guadalcanal.

This agreement among lower-ranking officers, reached at the Liaison Conference on March 7, took the form of "Guidelines To Be Followed in the Next Stage of the War," but as stated earlier, both Prime Minister Tojo and Operations Chief Tanaka Shin'ichi had misgivings about it. Nevertheless, since their subordinates had agreed upon it at a joint conference, they were helpless to object. Their worst fears had been realized, for they were about to plunge into a war that bore absolutely no resemblance to the Draft Proposal.

Why, then, did Army staff officers and their subordinates allow themselves to be led around by the Navy?

One reason is, as mentioned previously, that the Army did not have a firm grasp of the Draft Proposal. Also, they were overwhelmed by the great success at Pearl Harbor. The Army had its triumphs as well, landing on the Malay peninsula and heading straight for Singapore, which fell on February 15. Strategically, the capture of Singapore was exponentially more valuable than Pearl Harbor, but it was not as dramatic.

Accompanied by the strains of the "Warship March," reports of magnificent victories continued to emanate from the Navy Section of Imperial General Headquarters. The impact was huge, much greater than it had been for the Army. The Japanese public was wildly enthusiastic about the Navy's spirited fighting.

Recommendations that Phase 2 operations focus on preparing an invincible defense do imply a certain passivity. Perhaps that is why Army staff officers found themselves acquiescing to the successful Navy's aggressive proposals. As I mentioned previously, Commander Yamamoto's feat at Pearl Harbor and the influence of his power were decisive factors.

Hyperbole in Navy's war reports

The Navy accomplished some sensational victories: Pearl Harbor, and the sinking of the British battleships *HMS Prince of Wales* and *HMS Repulse* off the coast of Malaya by dint of Japanese air power alone. But announcements of subsequent “great victories” became increasingly exaggerated. Furthermore, since these amplifications made the Navy look better and better, the Army had no choice but to follow the Navy's lead and stretch the truth in their reports.

Figure 14 shows the extent to which statistics issued by the Navy Section of Imperial General Headquarters⁹ for 12 naval engagements were exaggerated. However, we must be mindful that it is quite difficult to get accurate figures for the number of enemy ships sunk or destroyed in naval battles, which can cover huge expanses of water. Also, since aircraft operate in even larger spaces and move at high speed, it is even more difficult to gauge the results of their activity.

However, a commanding officer must have the ability to grasp such information, and accurately so. When that ability weakens, reports of military gains gradually become overly optimistic. Then there is pride, which induces commanders to report favorable results. In other words, it is human to exaggerate.

And once you report a huge military gain, of course you want subsequent reports to be just as commendable. Consequently, figures provided by pilots were assumed to be accurate; they were not subject to careful scrutiny.

Even so, a look at Figure 14 tells us that the exaggeration of military achievements got out of hand. We also notice that as time went on, the hyperbole grew more frequent. However, Combined Fleet Chief of Staff Rear Admiral Ugaki Matome wrote in his war diary that “the fleet distinguished itself on many occasions during the effort to retake Guadalcanal. It was an annoying situation — no matter how many we shot down, the enemy never seemed to run out of planes.” Adm. Ugaki seems to have believed that there had been a great victory.¹⁰

⁹ Today the term “Imperial General Headquarters Announcement” is often used to describe an exaggerated claim. The correct term for this purpose is “Announcement Issued by Imperial General Headquarters, Navy Section.” During the war, Army Section announcements were closer to the truth. Therefore, I think it is unwise to use Imperial General Headquarters Announcement to mean an inflated claim that cannot be trusted.

¹⁰ Ogawa Kanji and Yokoi Toshiyuki, eds., *Sensoroku: Ugaki Matome* (War diary of Ugaki Matome), vols. 1 and 2 (Tokyo: Nihon Shuppan Kyodo, 1952:1953).

FIGURE 14: Exaggerated Reports of Battle Outcomes from IGH*

1. Battle of the Coral Sea (May 7-8, 1942): Port Moresby offensive operation

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Aircraft carriers	2	0	1	1
Battleships	1	2	0	0
Heavy cruisers	1	1	0	0
Light cruisers	0	1	0	0
Destroyers	1	0	1	0
Oil tankers	0	1	1	0
Aircraft	98 (shot down)		69 (shot down)	

*Imperial General Headquarters

2. Battle of Midway (June 4, 1942)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Aircraft carriers	2	0	1	0
Heavy cruisers	1	0	0	0
Destroyers	0	0	1	0
Aircraft	150 (shot down or damaged)		150 (shot down or damaged)	
(Damage incurred by the Japanese)				
Aircraft carriers	1	1	4	0
Aircraft	35 (shot down or damaged)		322 (shot down or damaged)	

3. First Battle of the Solomon Sea (August 7, 1942) Recapture Guadalcanal operation

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Heavy cruisers	8	1	4	1
Light cruisers	4	0	0	0
Destroyers	9	3	0	1
Submarines	3	0	0	0
Transport ships	10	3	0	0
Aircraft	58 (shot down)		21 (shot down)	

4. Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands (August 25 – October 26, 1942): Battle of the Eastern Solomons

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Aircraft carriers	3	0	1	1
Battleships	1	0	0	1
Cruisers	3	3	0	0
Destroyers	1	3	1	1
Aircraft	200 (shot down)		74 (shot down)	

5. Third Battle of Savo Island (November 12-14, 1942)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Battleships	0	2	0	1
Heavy cruisers	0	0	0	2
Light cruisers	8	3	0	0
Destroyers	5	4	7	2

6. Battle of Rennell Island (January 29-30, 1943)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Battleships	2	1	0	0
Cruisers	3	1	1	0
Destroyers	0	0	0	1

7. Operation I-Go (April 7-15, 1943)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Cruisers	1	0	0	0
Destroyers	2	0	1	0
Corvettes	0	0	1	1
Transport ships	19	8	2	2
Aircraft	134 (shot down)		25 (shot down)	
Japanese aircraft attrition: 61 planes				

8. Aerial battles over Bougainville (November 5 – December 3, 1943)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Aircraft carriers	5	2	Close to 0	Close to 0
Battleships	1	2	Close to 0	Close to 0
Cruisers	4	5	Close to 0	Close to 0
Destroyers	2	2	Close to 0	Close to 0

9. Aerial battles over Gilbert Islands (Kiribati) (November 19-29, 1943)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Aircraft carriers	7	4	Close to 0	Close to 0
Battleships	0	1	Close to 0	Close to 0
Cruisers	2	2	Close to 0	Close to 0
Destroyers	2	1	Close to 0	Close to 0

10. Battle of the Philippine Sea (June 19-20, 1944)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Aircraft carriers	1	4	0	2
Battleships	1	0	0	2
	Damage incurred by Japan		Damage incurred by US	
Aircraft carriers	3 sunk	4 slightly or moderately damaged	2 slightly damaged	
Battleships	1 slightly damaged		2 slightly damaged	
Cruisers	1 slightly damaged		2 slightly damaged	
Aircraft	476 lost		130 lost	

11. Formosa Aerial Battle (October 12-16, 1944)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Aircraft carriers	11	8	0	0
Battleships	2	2	0	0
Cruisers	3	4	0	2
Cruisers/destroyers	1	1	0	0
Warship type unknown	0	13	0	0

12. Battle of Leyte Gulf (October 24-26, 1944)

	Reported results		Actual results	
	Sunk	Destroyed	Sunk	Destroyed
Aircraft carriers	8	9	3	1
Battleships	0	1	0	0
Cruisers	4	2	0	1
Destroyers	4	3	3	0
Aircraft	500 (shot down)		125 (shot down)	

In the last operation Commander Yamamoto oversaw, 7. the I-Go Operation, the Japanese did not sink even one enemy cruiser. But the report makes claims to the contrary. Similarly, the report

states that they sank 19 transport ships, when the correct number is two. The worst overstatement is the claim that they shot down 134 aircraft, when in reality, they shot down only 25. In other words, that operation produced almost no military gains. Military authorities believed that there had been a great victory. Yamamoto even received a commendation from the Emperor! He had intended to visit the soldiers on the front line and tell them about the commendation to raise morale. But on his way there he was ambushed and killed, almost as if to take responsibility for his own self-indulgence.

The report issued after the Battle of Midway stated that only one Japanese carrier was lost, even though four were sunk. The Japanese lost 322 aircraft, but the report said 35 (10% of the actual number). Even if the hyperbole was intended to keep morale at home from weakening (even so, it was still unforgivable), the Army was given only the figures in the report. Since the Supreme Command of the Army and Navy were separate chains, the Navy was not obligated to report to the Army.

There is no evidence that the exaggerated “gains” were ever doubted by the Army until the very end of the war. Aroused by the spate of reports of great naval triumphs, the Army got caught up in the enthusiasm, and embraced the same decisive-battle doctrine. Army Staff Officer Lt. Col. Tsuji Masanobu went so far as to issue an order to “explore the overland route, together with Navy personnel already in place, in connection with the capture of Port Moresby.” Even though the results of reconnaissance had not been revealed, he issued an attack order.

Naval Zero aviator Sakai Saburo, dubbed the Attack Pilot King, commented as follows:

We did reconnaissance of that area any number of times, but it wouldn't have been possible for advancing units to use it. I reported to that effect, but a staff officer of the 25th Air Flotilla reported that there was a one-lane-wide path, which was a complete lie.¹¹

In the end, the Army became an accessory to the Navy; the decisive-battle doctrine had taken hold.

Most egregious instance of hyperbole: aerial battle off Taiwan

The most egregiously inflated battle reports were released after the aerial battle off Taiwan fought October 12-16, 1944. At home in Japan everyone was thrilled to learn that their men had scored a great victory, sinking 11 carriers, 2 battleships, and 3 cruisers. But in actuality, they had sunk no battleships, no cruisers, and certainly no carriers. Worst of all, Army staff officers believed that there had been a phenomenal victory, even at that late date.

General Staff Headquarters assumed that thanks to the military feats of the Navy, the enemy's task force had been annihilated. Headquarters had been preparing for a decisive battle in Luzon, but on the basis of the “victory” off Taiwan, they made a mammoth shift in strategy. Then they ordered

¹¹ Sato, *op. cit.*, 83.

the 14th Area Army, which had been preparing for the Luzon hostilities by positioning its troops, building fortifications, and completing an airfield, in order to be prepared for a showdown on Leyte. Commander Yamashita Tomoyuki protested vehemently, but to no avail. He hurriedly shifted his men and his preparations as ordered.

But they were attacked on the way there, so were never able to even establish a base. Their fighting ability weakened, and they were soundly defeated. The enemy carrier battle group, which had supposedly been annihilated, was in fine shape, and proceeded to launch a powerful aerial attack.

Looking at these embellished reports after the fact, I find it hard to believe that no one doubted them, especially because the course of the war thus far made them seem all the more unbelievable. But that was the reality of the time.

Possible violation of Emperor's position as commander in chief

The independence of the supreme command prerogative is one of the salient features of the Meiji constitutional system. The Meiji Constitution arose from a warrior-led feudal culture that had prevailed for centuries. But because of the world situation at that time, its drafters wanted to extricate Japan from that era to prevent powerful forces from interfering in or gaining control of military affairs. Accordingly, independence of the supreme command prerogative had little to do with Japanese tradition.

Rather, this is an instance of a preconceived notion's taking precedence. It appears that the idea of supreme command prerogative as a symbol of the Emperor's absolute authority had gained wide acceptance. Executive power and supreme-command authority within the bounds of sovereignty ultimately reverted to the Emperor. But in actuality, the prime minister and his subordinate ministers assisted the Emperor by doing the actual work required of the executive branch; the Emperor would then approve whatever they had accomplished.

A system that combined executive power and supreme-command authority should have been established as time wore on. But the idea that no permanent code of law should ever be altered (that one must never doubt the absoluteness of supreme command) prevailed, and a preconceived notion became conventional wisdom.

Then in 1930 an incident occurred involving possible violation of the Emperor's supreme command prerogative. This was essentially a dispute between the Ministry of the Navy (which was entrusted with overall management and governance within the Navy) and the Naval General Staff (which was in charge of the military command). During negotiations for the London Naval Treaty (signed on April 22, 1930), the Japanese government requested 70% of the tonnage allotted to the Americans, and the Ministry of the Navy compromised at 67.5%. The Naval General Staff expressed its dissatisfaction with those figures and announced its intention to submit a direct appeal to the Emperor.¹²

¹² This was a political dispute relating to the conclusion of the London Naval Treaty for the Reduction of Naval Armament. The London Naval Conference began in January 1930. After difficult negotiations, a compromise plan was reached between Japan and the US on March 13. The head of the Naval General Staff, Kato Kanji and others

Since decisions regarding the scale of military forces fell under the Emperor's prerogative over the organization and administration of the armed forces, the ministers of the Army and Navy gave the Emperor advice; in other words, these matters fell within the jurisdiction of the ministers of the Army and Navy. The Naval General Staff claimed that they were in *its* jurisdiction, because it bore the responsibility for the supreme command, and they would guard against flaws in operations, even if it meant ignoring past precedents.

But in the end, this was an internal naval dispute, and had no connection with the Emperor's authority. Nor did the Emperor ever complain that he was dissatisfied because someone had infringed upon his authority. In other words, the Naval General Staff broached the subject of the Emperor's authority, which had become a preconceived notion, because he wanted to get his way. Bringing up the Emperor's authority in order to advance one's position, is arguably the height of disloyalty. It is wrong to interpret this as government vs. supreme authority, or government versus the Emperor's sovereign authority.

Please allow me to digress for a moment. As far as the relationship among the Emperor, the military, and the government is concerned, there is one thing I am unable to comprehend even now. That concerns the rule stating that ministers of the Army and Navy must be officers on active duty. This rule was abolished during Prime Minister Yamamoto Gonbee's administration (1913-14, 1923-24), but was revived during the administration of Hirota Kouki (1936-37). It states that even someone appointed minister of the Army or Navy by a candidate for prime minister could be rejected if the military disliked him, and that is how the military came to control politics.

But the Emperor chose the prime-ministerial candidate by issuing an imperial command. It would seem that if the Army or Navy rejected a candidate chosen by the Emperor, they would be committing an act of disloyalty. Therefore, I wonder why this type of situation was tolerated and not given a second thought. It looks as though a preconceived notion, once formed, began to resemble the abnormal hypertrophy of the supreme command authority.

Split in supreme command authority of Army and Navy

At a liaison conference held by the Japanese government and Imperial General Headquarters, those present officially approved the Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of War Against the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek. In this book I have presented my opinions about the failure of the Japanese military to abide by it, instead waging a war that in no way resembled it. I have found reasons for some deviations from the Draft Proposal that I can accept, some more than others. But at the heart of the matter lurks a huge problem.

requested abrogation because the "three great principles" had not been included. But Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi, with the cooperation of Adm. Okada Keisuke and others, obtained the agreement of the Navy General Staff, sent instructions, and the treaty was signed on April 22. However, Kato pointed out defects in naval strategy and conveyed them to the Emperor. At a special Diet session held on April 23, opposition party Seiyukai representatives stated that by not incorporating the opinion of the Naval General Staff, the government was infringing on the Emperor's supreme command prerogative. Right-wing members also harshly criticized the government.

No one on the staff of Imperial General Headquarters or among the attendees of liaison conferences between Imperial General Headquarters and the government had the authority to enforce decisions. Imperial General Headquarters comprised the Army General Staff Office (supreme command of the Army) and the Naval General Staff (supreme command of the Navy). But no one involved in these bodies issued orders to take action on a decision reached at an Imperial General Headquarters conference. Therefore, both the Army and Navy implemented decisions that had been made according to their own preferences on some occasions (or failed to implement them on others). Also, since the Army and Navy had separate supreme command authority, they reported to the Emperor separately.

Perhaps readers will think, “What is your objection? After all, the Emperor is at the top of the chain of command.” But the Emperor simply grants the final approval; he does not issue orders with specific or functional instructions. It seems that many people misunderstand his role, but he was not a dictatorial or absolute monarch. Participating in the liaison conferences were Imperial General Headquarters, the prime minister, and key government officials. That is why they were called liaison conferences.

A major flaw of the Meiji Constitution was its failure to have the government participate in the supreme command authority. But more than that, the problem was that the supreme command authority governing the Army and Navy was completely separate. I often hear it said that the relationship between the Army and Navy was a rocky one, but we are not talking about a tea party. When a nation is waging war, it is vital to know whose orders take precedence.

In actuality, under the Meiji Constitution during the 1st Sino-Japanese War, according to wartime Imperial General Headquarters regulations, the chief of the Naval General Staff was subordinate to the chief of the Army General Staff. In other words, the chief of the Army General Staff enjoyed the right to issue orders to both the Army and Navy. Unhappy with this system, high-ranking Navy officer Yamamoto Gonbee¹³ (an admiral) during the Russo-Japanese War, submitted a proposal requesting that equal status be afforded to the two branches of the military. At that point in history, fortunately, so-called elder statesmen took it upon themselves to help the Army and Navy to reach agreements, so major problems were avoided.

But during the Greater East Asian War, as we have seen, there was no one who could fulfill that function. Without someone who could unify the two forces and issue orders, errors were made and some perfectly good strategies were wasted.

As I mentioned earlier, Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and Chiang were all dictators, and thus held sway over the armies and navies of the nations they controlled. But Japan not only lacked a dictator, but it also lacked an entity that could jointly oversee both its army and navy.

¹³ Yamamoto was a native of Satsuma Province (today Kagoshima Prefecture), who became a very influential figure. He rose to the rank of admiral and served as the 11th, 12th, and 13th Minister of the Navy, as the 16th and 22nd prime minister, and as the 37th minister of foreign affairs.

Why Saipan fell so quickly

At this point I would like to refer to one instance in which the lack of a coordinating authority caused great harm: Saipan. The largest island in the Marianas, Saipan held the key to the defense of the archipelago. It was also a strategic point, a last line of defense for the homeland. Readers may recall that in Chapter 3 I provided part of Lt. Gen. Ishiwara Kanji's response to questions from UPI and AP reporters. Here is an expanded version.

I said that we needed to strengthen islands near Japan (Saipan, Tinian, and Guam) until they were impregnable. We should fortify them to the point where we could prevail for any number of years. Furthermore, we should have made a concerted effort to resolve the China Incident (2nd Sino-Japanese War) through diplomacy.

We should have taken special care to make Saipan invulnerable. If we had done that, US troops could not have advanced that far. If they hadn't captured Saipan, they couldn't have bombed Japan proper.¹⁴

Then, how far did the Japanese get with safeguarding Saipan? The main strength of the 43rd Division, ordered to perform that task, landed on Saipan approximately two weeks prior to the enemy's arrival.

Army fortification specialists were sent to investigate the situation in the Marianas. They reported that units already there had not built anything resembling a fortified military camp. Construction work began immediately, but the enemy attacked before much progress had been made.

Prior to the US Army's landing, supported by air attacks and naval gunfire, the Japanese were unable to put up much of a fight. Twenty-one days after the enemy landed, on July 6, 1944, the Saipan garrison committed suicide en masse.

Because of the split between Army and Navy supreme command, the Pacific Ocean became the domain of the Navy. Therefore, the Army was unable to send troops to Pacific islands until requested by the Navy. To begin with, fortifying Saipan, which was a crucial base in the Marianas and a strategic point in the defense of Japan proper, should have been done during the latter half of first-phase operations. But the Navy ignored it, attacking the outer islands instead.

Even so, I find it odd that Prime Minister Tojo was forced to take responsibility for the fall of Saipan by resigning. Odd, because it was Navy elders who orchestrated the collapse of the Tojo Cabinet. I suppose it never occurred to them to realize that they were the responsible parties.

Violation of absolute defense perimeter

Furthermore, on September 24, 1943 when the overall war situation was worsening for Japan, the concept of an absolute defense perimeter strategy was adopted at a government-Imperial General

¹⁴ Takagi Kiyohisa, *Toa no Chichi: Ishiwara Kanji* (The father of East Asia: Ishiwara Kanji) (Tokyo: Kinbun Shobo, 1985).

Headquarters liaison conference.

The idea was to shrink the military front and after firming up the defense, counterattack.

For that reason, the South Pacific Islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, had to be fortified immediately so they would be unassailable. But the Navy paid no attention to that directive; nor did they ask the Army for assistance. In March 1944 an Army advance party landed on Saipan, but the main strength of the assigned unit did not arrive until June had come and gone.

In other words, in the year following the decision to create an absolute defense perimeter, the objectives had not been met, even though there was enough time.

As it was, Saipan, the greatest fortress in the Marianas, fell in about 20 days.

If, as Ishiwara stated, Saipan had been transformed into an impregnable fortress, what would have happened? Since there was a year's leeway, fortification was certainly possible.

If the Japanese had been prepared, how difficult would it have been to breach Saipan? Here are three examples that will answer this question: Biak, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima.

Biak

Biak is an island just off the western edge of New Guinea, on the way to the Philippines. It was an important island in 1944. On May 27 of that year MacArthur's invading troops reached the island.

The Japanese garrison defending Biak was the 10,000-strong 22nd Infantry Regiment commanded by Col. Kuzume Naoyuki. They had good fortune in the form of five months until the enemy landed, during which time they fortified the island by preparing a network of underground caves and tunnels. Accompanied by bombardment and shelling, the Americans landed, 30,000 of them (one-and-a-half divisions). But the Americans were unable to build even a bridgehead, and withdrew to the seas to plan a new attack. MacArthur replaced Maj. Gen. Horace Fuller with Robert Eichelberger as commander, and the Americans made another landing. The Kuzume unit defended Biak for more than a month, until July 1, when its men committed suicide.

Peleliu

Peleliu is an island off the western side of Palau; the Japanese Navy had an air base there. Adm. Chester Nimitz, who had been entrusted with the recapture of the Philippines, launched an attack targeting the air base. The Japanese garrison, comprising some 10,000 men and led by Col. Nakagawa Kunio, commander of the 2nd Infantry Regiment from Mito, fought with all its might. Its men repelled the 20,000-strong 1st Marine Division, then fought a pitched battle against the 1st Army Division for 71 days. The Americans had boasted that they would clean the place up in two or three days, but they were now facing their most difficult opponents in the Pacific. Even after the organized aspects of the 71-day battle had ended, the commando unit continued to fight until the war ended.

How was this possible? Col. Nakagawa had completely fortified the island over a period of four months. That is the beauty of fortification. The island is 13 square kilometers in area, and its highest mountain is 50 meters above sea level. Those were the conditions, and they enabled the Japanese to fortify the island, which made it possible to fight such a battle.

Chester Nimitz, commander of the enemy forces, wrote an encomium citing the bravery of the Japanese soldiers. A monument with the English text, along with a Japanese translation, on it stands in memory to the troops of both sides, on Peleliu Island (see Figure 15).

Iwo Jima

Since the Americans needed an airfield for takeoffs and landings of escort fighter planes for the B-29s used to bomb Japanese targets, the Americans decided to attempt the capture of Iwo Jima. On February 19, 1945 they began their landing. Engaging the American forces were Lt. Gen. Kuribayashi Tadamichi and his 13,000 troops, reinforced by 7,000 Navy men. They resisted the Americans bravely, using the caves and tunnels they had prepared to advantage. For one month and eight days, they fought the Americans, inflicting more damage than they suffered. The surviving Japanese soldiers committed suicide.

This was possible because Lt. Gen. Kuribayashi, who had been named commander of the Ogasawara Corps in June 1944, decided to fortify the island by digging tunnels rather than preparing a beach defense, which was the usual method. And they had time to accomplish the task.

Iwo Jima is about twice as large as Peleliu, with an area of 24 square kilometers. It has a mountain with an altitude of 170 meters. But it was very difficult to dig tunnels there because of the volcanic soil. Even so, once the fortification had been planned, it turned out to have considerable defensive strength. Saipan has five times the area of Iwo Jima, and a mountain that is 473 meters high. If it had been fortified, the Japanese could have held out for at least six months. Unfortunately, it was not, and fell in 20 days.

As I mentioned earlier, one's point of view notwithstanding, this was not Prime Minister Tojo's fault. But the Tojo Cabinet was forced to take responsibility for the fall of Saipan by resigning.

As Ishiwara Kanji indicated, if Saipan had not fallen, B-29s could not have bombed Japan. Some time ago, someone came up and said to me, full of confidence, "The US had the atomic bomb, so Japan was bound to lose the war, no matter what." But if, as Ishiwara said, Saipan, Tinian, and Guam had been fortified, the Americans would have had great difficulty capturing them. And in that case, they couldn't have firebombed Tokyo, and they could forget about their atomic bomb.

Defense of Pacific islands required Army-Navy cooperation

If the strategy for the defense of the Marianas, as Ishiwara Kanji urged, had been one where the supreme command of the Army and Navy worked hand in hand, it probably would have been possible to proceed in the direction suggested by Ishiwara. It certainly would not have been

impossible in terms of financial, technical, manpower, or temporal resources. Defense of the Pacific islands was the jurisdiction of the Navy. The Army didn't make a move until asked by the Navy. That is how the separation between the two branches worked, and how the trouble began. With such an arrangement it was not possible to protect the Pacific Ocean.

After all, without a long, hard look at the separation of supreme command, it is impossible to take a long, hard look at the way the war was conducted, and I think more than a few readers will agree with me.

[CAPTIONS]

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Figure 15: Commander in Chief Nimitz's encomium to the Japanese military men who defended Iwo Jima