

Japan's Master Plan for Victory: What Could Have Been.

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“...Americans play to win all of the time. I wouldn't give a hoot in hell for a man who lost and laughed. That's why Americans have never lost nor will ever lose a war; for the very idea of losing is hateful to an American.”

-General George Patton, June 5, 1944, in a speech to the US Third Army.

The dominant narrative of the so-called Pacific War, the conflict between Imperial Japan, the West and its allies, is that the Japan's defeat was “inevitable,” even “irresistible”. “How could a country with a GNP [gross national product] about that of... Canada expect to win...” against the West? On the other side of the same coin, Japan was written off as “basically evil,” an “aggressor nation” showing a “total lack of sympathy or respect for her neighbors.” Logically, according to the dominant narrative, Japan deserved America's relentless fire-bombings of all her cities and America's one-sided nuclear war—these, in the world of the “dominate narrative,” were “manifestly just”. Even the mere thought that there are alternative narratives would be “hateful” to Americans.

Few Japanese historians, as well as most Western historians, have bothered to transcend the “dominant narrative” in order to clearly understand Imperial Japan's motivation to go to war against the West. One possible reason why such a challenge has yet to be undertaken is that it could lead to uncomfortable realizations that the Allies could have lost or could not have achieved the “unconditional surrender” they demanded, as per the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945. A few Americans, though, have mulled over Imperial Japan's decision to take on the West.¹ General Douglas MacArthur, former Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers in Japan, stated his thoughts before a US Senate subcommittee in 1951. MacArthur stated that because Japan was entirely dependent on the “Asiatic basin,” which supplied “basic materials” necessary for Japan's survival, denial to these basic materials would lead to social and economic collapse. Thus, MacArthur stated, “[Japan's] purpose... in going to war was largely dictated by security.” While this was likely to be the case, one further wonders if Japan had a plan or a strategy to prosecute such a critical war for survival.

Author Moteki Hirromichi picks up on the missing thread, of Japan's strategic plan to ensure its own survival by grinding away the US's will to fight through a series of bold tactical, psychological and economic as well as military maneuvers. Moteki tells us that the missing thread that clearly showed that Japan thought carefully of her own survival, rather than world domination, was the “Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of War Against the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek,”

¹ Not a few scrupulous American scholars have gone beyond the “dominate narrative” to show the stark truth and, in return, have been rewarded with condemnation. E.g., Charles Tansill, author of *Back Door to War* (1953, Henry Regnery).

or the “Draft Proposal,” for short. This plan was duly adopted at a Liaison Conference between Imperial General Headquarters and the Imperial Government, held on November 15, 1941. While Moteki has written extensively on prewar and wartime Japan, he relates that the “Draft Proposal” was new to him. He has interwoven history that is not very well known to Westerners, placing the “Draft Proposal” into context of the times.

A group of civilian economists in the Army War Economy Group, Ministry of War, were tasked to compare Japan’s war fighting potential to that of other nations, especially the UK and the US, and to create a winning strategy based on Japan’s potential. The economists issued a report, “Survey of US-UK Allied Economic Potential, Part 1,” in July 1941, which covered not only military strategy but psychological, diplomatic and economic strategy as well. The “Survey” was used to guide planning within the Japanese military and following internal discussions based on the “Survey,” “Guidelines for War Against the US, the UK and the Netherlands” was issued and approved by the Department of the Army and Navy, and Imperial General Headquarters, on September 29, 1941. In turn, Lt. Col. Ishii Akio, Ministry of the Army, and Commander Fujii Shigeru, Ministry of the Navy, utilized the “Guidelines” as the basis of the “Draft Proposal,” which was adopted by the Liaison Conference.

The “Draft Proposal” spelled out the weaknesses at the time in industrial production of both the US and UK. Given the UK’s reliance on American industrial production, it made strategic sense to attack the UK, and with the UK weakened or unable to continue, Japan would persuade the US that conflict with Japan would be futile. According to the “Draft Proposal,” goals were to be achieved by a coordinated Axis effort to stymie the UK’s position in North Africa and the oil-rich Middle East and to take control of the Indian Ocean. While the US sent war material to the UK and later to the USSR via the Arctic Ocean route and over the northern Pacific Ocean to Vladivostok, the US also utilized the southern Pacific to reach the Indian Ocean to supply the UK and its colonial holdings and the USSR. Had Japan focused on controlling the Indian Ocean, supplies from the US to her allies would have been effectively cut. In fact, Moteki points out that Prime Minister Churchill’s expressed his concern to President Roosevelt on April 15, 1942 that should Japan control the Western Indian Ocean the British position in the Middle East would collapse and supplies to Russia would be cut. With the UK in a weakened position, according to the “Draft Proposal,” the US would “lose the will to continue hostilities against Japan.” A number of other goals were spelled out in the “Draft Proposal,” such as inviting the USSR join with the Axis and allow it to move south into British possessions such as Persia and India, to remove Western bases in Asia and the Pacific and to attain self-sufficiency of needed resources.

Ultimately, the “Draft Proposal” sketched a concrete plan for national survival, given Japan’s industrial output and lack of access to resources as defined by the Army War Economy Group, rather than pie-in-the-sky world domination. The economists stated that that Japan did not have a lot of time, in that the US would soon be able to increase production to supply the UK and that Japan cannot afford to get bogged down into a war of attrition.

The key question for readers becomes why was the “Draft Proposal” not followed as written, as Imperial General Headquarters and both the Army and Navy agreed? Indeed, modern Japanese historians have either ignored or downplayed the importance of the “Draft Proposal”. At the lowest level, one can shrug and blurt that Allied victory was “inevitable” and “irresistible”. However, as Moteki shows, history is made by men who are all-too-human.

One example of Japanese tactical consideration based the strengths of the US and UK was the “Draft Proposal’s” suggestion to move Japan’s Navy to the south, thereby securing its sea lanes, and to allow the US Navy to move into the western Pacific, and, at a time of Japan’s choosing, attack and destroy the US fleet. Instead, Japan chased after the US Navy, attacking Pearl Harbor and later attacking the US Pacific Fleet at Midway. Behind both disasters, and later battles, such as Battle of Guadalcanal, was Supreme Commander Yamamoto Isoroku. With the glamorous success of the Pearl Harbor attack, Moteki suggests that Yamamoto pretty much got a free hand running the war in the Pacific, with disastrous results. The Army, which had fewer spectacular successes than the Navy, kept quiet and went along with the Navy—the Japanese military fell victim to “victory disease”. Victory disease, rather than prudence, dictated Japanese military strategy.

The current book could have mentioned another all-too-human personality: Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke. While he was keen on signing an alliance with Germany and Italy, the Emperor Showa was not. Nonetheless, the pact was signed on September 1940. Matsuoka thought that such an alliance would “force the United States to act more prudently in carrying out here plans against Japan.”² The US responded by expanding her list of embargoed goods. Matsuoka also stated that should conflict arise with Germany, Japan was not obligated to join on the side of Germany. In April 1941, ignoring German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop’s words of prudence as well as ignoring a warning from the Japanese ambassador to Germany, Oshima Hiroshi, Matsuoka signed a non-aggression pact with the USSR, and hoped to get the Soviets to later join an alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan. In June, the Germans invaded the USSR and the Soviets moved military units from Siberia to defend Moscow. With the USSR in a life-and-death struggle with Germany, the Japanese strenuously refrained from assisting the Germans, including attacking commercial supply ships from the US headed for the USSR. At the same time, forgetting the neutrality pact he signed with Stalin, Matsuoka “recommended an immediate attack on Siberia.” On reading one of Matsuoka’s intercepted cables, President Roosevelt stated that the message was “a product of a mind which is deeply disturbed and unable to think quietly or logically.”

Moteki has done a great service by getting the “Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of War Against the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek,” into the light of day and bringing it to the attention of Western historians. He points out that Japanese historians have dismissed any importance of the “Draft Proposal”—even two of those related to the preparation of the studies that underlie the “Draft Proposal” denounced it after the end of the war. It is hoped that more primary

² Toland, J. *The Rising Sun*. NY, NY: Modern Library

source documents of the Greater East Asia War be released by Japanese scholars. The war ended over 75 years ago, and the only survivors of that war who can speak to us in a detached, unflinching manner are documents of the time.