

# Review of Moteki Hiromichi's "Japan's Master Plan for Victory: What Could Have Been"

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Mr. Moteki's new book challenges the reader's understanding of the Pacific War. The challenge is not formulated explicitly, but it can be formulated thus: "What if I told you that there was a realistic way for Japan to win the war?" The readers' first reaction could be that this is another "revisionist" treatise or that it is one of those popular "what if" books that try to guess the possible alternative development of historical events.

There are a few fascinating books in the second category often written by prominent historians that present different potential historical results, like Richard Pipes who tries to imagine history after a hypothetical failure of communism in the 1917 Russia [What if, 2021, p.38-40]. Other of the essays in them challenge the outcome of World War II: "What if... Germany had won the battle of Great Britain" [What if, 2021, p.86] or "what if... Japan had not struck Pearl Harbor" [Ibid., p.90] or other possibilities: "How Hitler Could Have Won the War: The Drive for the Middle East, 1941" [What if, 1999, p.295], "Our Midway Disaster: Japan Springs a Trap, June 4, 1942" [Ibid., p.311]. Even the Jewish history is analyzed from a similar point of view, like "What if the Final Solution had been completed?: Nazi memory in a victorious Reich" [What Ifs of Jewish History, p.311] and "What if the Holocaust had been averted?" [Ibid., p.332].

Although such essays demonstrate the erudition of their authors, they are most often conjectures based on incomplete information. In contrast, Mr. Moteki's book is based on meticulous research of the historical reality.

His approach makes it very difficult to put the book in the first mentioned category, the historical "revisionism". Revisionism implies a capricious interpretation of a set of facts established beyond any doubt. Unfortunately, Roosevelt's propaganda machine, which survived his death and continued its life in the GHQ censorship program, established a simplistic picture of the events that was mostly limited to the racist anti-Japanese tropes that dominated the press during World War II. It is a picture that even today dominates the minds of the ordinary Americans, a picture that presents Japan as the absolute villain and absolves the Allies, and especially the USA, from any wrongdoing. And anybody who questions its accuracy, even with a preponderance of facts, is labeled "revisionist". Ironically, communists also love this term.

Despite this grim reality, it is good to see that somebody questions the

status quo. Mr. Moteki's balanced presentation of the facts challenges the edifice of censorship and opens the window to a realistic interpretation of the Pacific War.

In the beginning, Moteki states that he intends to answer the common question of why Japan, a country with low resources and lesser industrial development than the Western countries, started a war against the USA that had no chance of success. Moteki argues that such a view is based on incomplete knowledge of history and his purpose in the book is to show, based on specific facts, that Japan had a workable plan [Moteki, pp.1-5].

A chain of events, starting with the Great Depression in 1929, eventually led to hostilities. The devastating consequences of the crisis led to protectionism, under which the USA and Great Britain introduced in the early 1930s tariffs on over 20,000 imported goods, which affected heavily Japan's exports. Politically, under the Stimson Doctrine, the USA refused to acknowledge the Japanese interests in Manchuria, while the interests of the Western countries in the area were not questioned. The expansion of the Comintern in East Asia and the communist spy network in the Roosevelt administration complicated additionally the situation [Moteki, pp.8-12].

The hostility toward Japan evolved into a full-blown economic blockade. On July 26, 1939, the USA abruptly announced its abrogation of the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between the US and Japan. No specific reason was given, but it was to stop Japan from fighting China by depriving it of ammunitions. On July 28, 1941, the Japanese assets in the USA were frozen. An entry in the US Secretary of War Henry Stimson's diary about the Japanese on November 25, 1941, stated: "the question is how we should maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves". On July 23, 1941, President Roosevelt signed a plan (JB355) stating that American planes will bomb Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe and Nagasaki, flying from China pretending to be Chinese forces. It was supposed to start on October 1, 1941. Moteki argues that all these actions designed to cripple Japan amounted to an act of war and he quotes Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg (1928) and Gen. Douglas MacArthur (1951) who also saw an economic blockade in the same way [Moteki, pp.12-21].

The attempt to resolve this dire situation led to a set of measures summarized in an important document, which is the central focus of Moteki's book: "Draft Proposal for Hastening the End of War against the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Chiang Kai-shek (Approved at the Liaison Conference between Imperial General Headquarters and the Imperial Government, held on November 15, 1941)", and is quoted in full [Moteki, pp.24-28]. Some Japanese historians treat the Draft Proposal with skepticism, as an unrealistic creation of bureaucrats, but the truth is that it was the result of research done by members of the

Army War Economy Research Group, a.k.a. the Akimaru Unit, which started its work in January 1940. The unit was a think tank, which included Japan's leading intellectuals with various ideological views. Their research was a meticulous survey based on 250 separate reports [Moteki, pp.139-150].

The main strategic principle of the Drat Proposal is to ensure the nation's survival and self-defense by destroying the American, British, and Dutch bases in the Far East. The Chiang government must also be overthrown. With the help of Germany and Italy, Great Britain must be defeated. A direct attack against the USA, like Pearl Harbor, was not in the plan.

Moteki notes that the destruction of the bases was a realistic strategy, which was executed in the early stages of the war. Stopping the supply lines of Great Britain through the Indian Ocean was important to Japan, because the Atlantic Ocean was already difficult to navigate due to the German submarines and the vital lines, including the supplies for the Soviet Union, used the Indian Ocean. According to the proposal, the defeat of the UK was to bring independence to Burma and eventually India. Restraining the US military capabilities had to bring freedom to the Philippines.

A blunder in the plan was the refusal to enter in war with the Soviet Union and the unrealistic statement that Japan would mediate peace between it and Germany at the time of their fierce military confrontation. This was based on the neutrality pact between Japan and the Soviet Union, which turned out to be unreliable. Japan took it seriously, but the Soviet Union eventually attacked.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to statistical analysis of the Japanese and US military capabilities in the beginning of the war, which showed the clear advantage of Japan. For example, Japan had 10 battle ships, US - 11 in the Pacific fleet (out of 17); Japan had 10 aircraft carriers, US - 3 in the Pacific fleet (out of 7). The aircraft of Japan totaled 4,800, as opposed to the US 5,500, of which Japan had battle-ready 2,319, US - 2,400 [Moteki, pp.57-62].

The Draft Proposal was realistic because it called for concentration of Japan's forces near the area of South-East Asia and the Indian Ocean. Japan's goal was to secure its resources, not to conquer the world. It would have been practical to focus on that region, instead of starting battles in the vast Pacific Ocean, where large distances made nearly impossible to supply the troops with ammunitions and provisions. Taking full control over the British supply lines in the Indian Ocean was an option, which alarmed Churchill who wrote to Roosevelt in April 1942 that the possible Japanese incursion into India and dominance over the Indian Ocean routes would bring collapse to the British position in the Middle East and loss of control over the oil supplies [Moteki, p.69-87].

This is out of the scope of Moteki's book, but it is worth mentioning that

Indians at the time were reluctant to support the UK's war in Europe, because the colonial power forced them to pay for it while providing little in return. The Atlantic Charter drawn up by Churchill and Roosevelt in August 1941, promoted self-government but only for countries occupied by Germany, no such right was given to the colonies [Mitchell, pp.234-235]. All attempts of the Indian National Congress to gain freedom for India were ignored, which caused some leaders, like Subhas Chandra Bose to seek help from the Axis. The exploitation of India reached grotesque forms in 1942, when the British introduced the so-called "Denial Policy" designed to limit the food supplies if the Japanese invaded India [Ghosh, p.51]. It removed the "surplus stock" from the Bengal area and removed from circulation about 25,000 boats used by the locals for fishing and transportation in order not to fall in the hands of the Japanese [Ghosh, p.52]. These measures, combined with poor food supply organization by the British and the lower-than-expected harvest, caused in 1943 the infamous Bengal famine. It was a humanitarian disaster, in which over 3 million villagers in the region perished.

If Japan could provide the self-determination desired by the people of India, the catastrophe could have been averted.

Further, Moteki provides an objective analysis of why the plan was not fulfilled and why Japan chose to attack Pearl Harbor and start battles at faraway Pacific islands. For example, due to such errors out of 160,000 troops sent to New Guinea with few options for delivering supplies, more than 100,000 died of starvation. The errors were caused by internal conflicts in the government and the rivalry between the Army and the Navy. Prime Minister Tojo was not a dictator. Despite being also Minister of War, 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. Tojo could not overrule the staff officers. He did not have the unchecked power that Churchill, Stalin or Roosevelt had over their armies. The Navy imposed their own vision, which led to many problems. [Moteki, pp.97-103]. General Tojo stated on February 16, 1945, in private conversation: "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" [Moteki, p.104].

Related to this is the myth of the Emperor's absolute authority, which is still maintained in the Western historiography. The truth is that the executive power assisted the Emperor by doing the work and he approved whatever they proposed. And in the military matters, it was the Army and the Navy that decided and none of them could bring up the Emperor's authority to advance their cause. He was only giving his approval and did not have involvement in the executive branch [Moteki, p.127].

Moteki sees the root cause of the deviation from the Draft Proposal in the successful attack of Pearl Harbor, masterminded by Commander Yamamoto, but never recommended in the original plan. It raised his authority and created the impression of a possibility of a victory in the Pacific. Pearl Harbor was a tactical victory but a strategic defeat. Yamamoto spent some time in the USA but did not know the American mentality. He thought that a crushing attack would discourage the Americans from future fighting, but it only increased their resolve to fight back [Moteki, pp.106-113]. Additionally, the Navy had a history of misrepresenting the results of the battles in the Pacific, often grossly exaggerating the American losses, which later led to surprises. Most egregious case of deception was a battle off Taiwan, October 12-16, 1944. The Navy reported that they sank 11 carriers, 2 battleships, and 3 cruisers, but none of this was true [Moteki, pp.120-122].

The main value of Moteki's book is the sober and objective analysis of the realities of the Pacific War. It shows Japan within the context of the international relations at the time and helps to understand its reactions to confrontations from which the Western countries are absolved and Japan is blamed for everything negative. In that sense, the book dispels the myth of the "foolish Japs" who dared to go against the power of the USA. Unfortunately, this cartoonish myth, rooted in Western racial prejudice, which is much older than the conflicts of the 1930s, still persists. Hopefully, such books will gradually change the public perception from a knee-jerk emotional reaction to objectivity.

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