

# THE USSR, JAPAN, AND THE END OF THE GREAT PACIFIC WAR

by

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**I**n the mid-afternoon of 5 April 1945 Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov summoned Japanese Ambassador Sato Nao-take to his office. Since the beginning of April Sato had met with abrupt treatment while conducting the business of his Embassy. He was sure he knew why this was happening. He had long warned the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo that the conjunction of American successes in the Great Pacific War with Russian successes in the European War was giving the Russians the time and the opportunity to reconsider their awkward relationship with Japan. The defeat of 1905 at Japan's hands had never been forgotten by Russians, whether Tsarist or Soviet, and the USSR badly wanted to regain possession of Southern Karafuto and the Kwantung peninsula and to procure "special rights" in the Manchurian provinces of China. Sato had advised Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru that it would be wise if Japan voluntarily abrogated the Treaty of Portsmouth which the Russians so hated without, however, relinquishing the rights which Japan had gained under that treaty. This extraordinary step was, he believed, necessary if Japan were to retain Russia's neutrality and with it any hope of using the USSR as a mediator for peace with the United States in order to bring to an end a war that had become a disaster for Japan. Sato had delicately broached the

fringes of such a subject with Molotov and he had reason to expect that the summons that afternoon would be to a further consideration of this matter. He had ready a draft proposal for abrogation of the Portsmouth Treaty, and the next time he saw Molotov he planned to use it as an inducement to encourage the USSR to renew the Treaty of Neutrality of 1941, which was the only guarantee the hard-pressed Japanese had that they would not have to fight a two-front war. It originally had been the only guarantee the Russians had that they would not have to fight a two-front war.

When Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yosuke went to Moscow from Berlin in 1941 to renew the treaty which established neutrality and allocated fishing rights between Japan and the USSR, he knew that Germany intended to go to war with the USSR—and he knew further that Hitler and Goering wanted Japan's cooperation in that war.<sup>1</sup> He was also aware that his own military forces were about to move southward to take over the Southern Resources Area; this made it more important that the USSR be neutralized in Northeast Asia, precluding Japan's aiding her nominal ally Germany in accordance with the Tripartite Pact. Matsuoka had been instructed by the Japanese high command to secure a nonaggression pact with the USSR, but Stalin, cannier than

Matsuoka thought, refused any commitment greater than neutrality. The treaty was signed on 13 April 1941 and reaffirmed in January 1943. But by January 1943 the war had begun to go badly for Japan. The pivotal victory at Stalingrad caused the Japanese oligarchy to begin to regard the USSR with trepidation, for no matter how poorly things went for Japan, as long as Germany and the USSR were locked in a death grip, Japan could concentrate her forces against the United States. But with the defeat of the German 6th Army on the Volga in February 1943, the tide turned in favor of the USSR. Moreover, with the passage of 1943 Japan's grip on the Southern Resources Area became weaker. By July 1944, after her defeat in the Marianas, Japan was severed from her empire to the south.

Facing the possibility of increased pressure from the USSR and aware that Japan could not fight a two-front war, Foreign Minister Shigemitsu urged Sato on 2 April 1944 to work toward a prolongation of the Neutrality Treaty while at the same time avoiding any implication that Japan was soliciting from weakness.<sup>2</sup> On 14 July 1944 Sato was assured by Jacob Malik, Soviet ambassador to Japan, that the USSR kept the treaty always in mind and consistently took action to remain in compliance with it. By the late summer of 1944 Sato, who had a keen grasp of things Russian, was informing Tokyo that since the USSR's attitude would be "the determining factor in the destiny of our empire," the Japanese high command should cease its continual anti-Soviet rhetoric and conform its policy to the consistently agreeable line taken by the Foreign Ministry.<sup>3</sup> Shigemitsu was just as apprehensive as Sato. When in July he ordered Sato to sound out Molotov on the future of Japan-USSR relations, he was concerned over any effect the Dumbarton Oaks Conference might have on that relationship.<sup>4</sup> There seemed little doubt that the Allies would urge the USSR to join them against Japan at the proper time. There were also a number of irritants in the Soviet-Japanese relationship: troubles on the Manchurian border; seizure of each other's commercial vessels in northern waters;

charges of malicious behavior against Ambassador Malik's son; and charges of disorderly conduct against a Japanese attaché in Moscow. Matsuoka was fearful that once the USSR felt free to do so, it would use these irritants as a *casus belli*.

By the autumn of 1944, Japanese representatives abroad were warning Tokyo that Germany would soon fall and it was to be heard that Russia would then turn against Japan.<sup>5</sup> Yet Sato was reporting from Moscow that Molotov gave every evidence that the Russians held and would continue to hold to their neutral attitude.<sup>6</sup> But Tokyo was receiving information that Stalin had promised President Roosevelt the use of Siberian air bases and that in the United States there was high-level talk of war between Russia and Japan. The year 1944 passed in a welter of conflicting information about the intentions of the USSR.

**F**ortunately for his peace of mind Shigemitsu did not know the true intentions of the USSR. As early as 6 October 1942, Stalin had told General Omar Bradley that "although Japan and Russia had a neutrality pact no one in Russia believed any Japanese statement and that he felt Japan might attack at any time."<sup>7</sup> In October 1943 Molotov had told the head of the US Military Mission, General Dean, that the USSR would join the war in the Pacific as soon as Germany was defeated. At the Tehran Conference, Stalin again promised a Soviet entry into the war against Japan in

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exchange for the Kurile Islands, Karafuto, and a warm-water port on the Pacific. Later that year Stalin told Churchill that the USSR would open hostilities against Japan about three months after the end of the European war.<sup>8</sup> By this time the US government, which had welcomed, anticipated, and planned for Soviet entry into the war against Japan, recognized that such entry was no longer essential in order to defeat Japan but that self-interest alone would bring the USSR into the war at some time and in some manner chosen by the USSR. Tokyo was not privy to these conversations, but the increasing tension in the day-to-day exchanges with the USSR was sufficient to deeply concern the Japanese Foreign Ministry. In October of 1944 Shigemitsu heard from Harbin that the Soviet Consul-General there regarded Soviet-Japanese relations as "awkward."<sup>9</sup> And they were to become increasingly so, because by the end of October 1944 the Japanese Fleet had been substantially destroyed off Leyte, in Surigao Strait, and in San Bernadino Strait. Japan, by the end of October 1944, stood before the USSR in a posture of weakness, and Stalin quite understood how to advantage himself of that.

At this point there begins a marked divergence between Ambassador Sato and his Foreign Ministry on how best to manage the deteriorating relationship with the USSR. Sato was convinced that he understood Stalin and Soviet policy much better than did the Foreign Ministry or the Japanese War Council. He was in no doubt by late 1944 of the outcome of the war. He suffered no illusions about Japan's destiny once the USSR was free of Germany. Stalin himself had told Sato on 6 November 1944 that Japan was an "aggressive" nation whose attack on Pearl Harbor was comparable to the invasion of White Russia and the Ukraine by Germany.<sup>10</sup> Once free of Germany, wrote Sato, Stalin would join the Allies, primarily to establish communist influence in Asia as in Europe. Despite his apprehensions he believed that his low-key approach to Molotov would work, and he told Shigemitsu in late 1944 that his work in Moscow was being hampered by the Russian distaste for

the openly expressed views of certain "so called Rightists" and of the War Council.<sup>11</sup> As 1945 dawned Sato reported that Molotov gave no obvious indication of turning against Japan. In hope of this Sato had prepared a policy of concessions such as the return of the Chinese Eastern Railway, the sale of choice fishing installations at unreasonably low figures, and the cession of Southern Karafuto; all of which he hoped would be acceptable to the USSR for their continued neutrality. But as 1945 developed Sato became more and more pessimistic. The great Russian counterattack to the west was well underway. He wrote Shigemitsu that Russia should conquer Germany by early spring, whereupon she would have no further use for the Neutrality Treaty.<sup>12</sup>

Shigemitsu by now had no illusions about the outcome of the war and the role of the Russians, but he was under enormous pressure from the Japanese military command to get a continuation of the treaty. The day he directed Sato to discuss that matter with Molotov, 8 February 1945, was barely ten weeks from the time when the treaty, if not denounced by either party, would automatically be continued. On 22 February 1945 Molotov requested that the discussion of Russia's intention in this regard be postponed because the question was related to a number of other problems, but he told Sato, "Your inquiry is appropriate and the attitude of your government has filled me with deep satisfaction."<sup>13</sup> Sato left Molotov that day convinced that the USSR was prepared to enter into discussions concerning the extension of the treaty although this might well involve substantial Japanese concessions. He believed that "it would be wonderful even if as a maximum we could get the pact renewed for another five years."<sup>14</sup> On 5 April 1945 Sato, in good spirits, went to the long-awaited meeting, where Molotov read to him:

The Neutrality Treaty between the Soviet Union and Japan was concluded April 13, 1941, which was before Germany's attack on the Soviet Union and before the outbreak of war between Japan on the one hand and Great Britain and the United States on the

other. Since that time the situation has basically changed. Germany has attacked the Soviet Union and Japan, the ally of Germany, has been helping Germany in her war against the United States and Great Britain, allies of the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances the Neutrality Treaty between Japan and the Soviet Union has lost its meaning and the extension of this treaty has become impossible.

As a consequence of the facts stated above, and in accord with Article 3 of the Treaty, which stipulates the right to serve notice of the abrogation of the Treaty one year prior to the expiration of the Treaty's five year period of validity, the Soviet Government, by this document, here announces to the Japanese Government its desire to abrogate the Treaty of 13th of April, 1941.<sup>15</sup>

Sato was stunned. He returned to his Embassy, informed Tokyo of the abrogation, apologized for his "lack of effort," and offered his resignation.<sup>16</sup> He wrote a following message in which he analyzed the abrogation as a Soviet attempt to play up to Great Britain and the United States and thus to win their acquiescence in the Soviet control of Eastern Europe and for the proposed Soviet voting procedures in the Security Council of the new United Nations. The Russians he met were still courteous to him, but the Soviet press began a review of Japan's conduct toward Russia from 1905 through the Siberian Intervention to the battle of Nomonhan and concluded that Japan for years had "conducted aggressive policies toward the USSR," noting again and again that Japan had been "helping Germany."<sup>17</sup> As this war of nerves against Japan continued in *Izvestia*, Sato concluded that the Soviet Union was not as yet prepared to go to war in the Far East and in lieu of that would gradually put pressure on Japan through press campaigns and through transferring troops to the Manchurian border. The whole business was designed to oblige Japan to assume "a policy of obsequiousness based on fear."<sup>18</sup>

Within three weeks of the abrogation Germany surrendered. Japan stood alone. Before the collapse Vice Admiral Abe had proposed to the German high command that in event of surrender surviving German naval forces be sent to the Pacific to operate with the Japanese navy. Hitler turned this down and "stated that in the unlikely possibility of Germany's inability to continue the fight in Europe [this on 19 April 1945] further consideration would be given."<sup>19</sup> It was too late for any help from Germany save for the lessons to be learned from observations of the last-ditch defense of Berlin which might usefully be applied to a possibly similar situation in Japan.

Tokyo had a grave problem in attempting to control the shock of the German surrender on the minds of the Japanese people and of the people in Japanese-held areas. So as "to prevent unrest in Greater East Asia,"<sup>20</sup> the German surrender was handled simply by stressing the intensification of Japan's war activities. On 5 May 1945 Radio Tokyo told the Japanese people that Germany had surrendered and emphasized the infallibility of Japan. But on 5 May 1945 the German naval attache in Tokyo radioed German naval headquarters in Flensburg that "since the situation is clearly recognized to be helpless, large sections of the Japanese armed forces would not regard with disfavor an American request for capitulation even if its terms were hard, provided they were halfway honorable."<sup>21</sup> And from Kase in Berne and from Mitani formerly in Paris and now in Berne came warnings to Tokyo to negotiate a peace.

**J**apan began to meet with increasing Soviet intransigence on matters large and small and perforce began to assume that posture Sato dreaded and had foretold, "obsequiousness based on fear." Beginning at the end of April 1945 Soviet diplomats in Moscow and in Tokyo presented and persisted in complaints against real and alleged Japanese misdeeds. The Soviet press and radio hammered at Japan as an aggressive state, ranging in their examples from the

surprise attack on the Russian Far Eastern Squadron at Port Arthur in 1904 to aid and comfort given the Nazis. To all of this Togo Shigenori, who had succeeded Shigemitsu as Foreign Minister, turned the other cheek. He advised Japanese authorities and agents in foreign parts to do likewise. Far more worrisome were the increasing number of reports concerning the transfer of Soviet men and material to the Far East. Sato, whose forebodings were now being realized, wrote the Foreign Minister on 9 May 1945 that it was possible the Soviet Union might not actually go to war. They might, for a price, act as a go-between with the United States. The price would be a return of all the spoils of 1905 plus "special rights" in Korea and China. "Japan will be forced to dance to whatever tune strikes the Russian fancy."<sup>22</sup> He urged that the Southern Resources Area be abandoned (Japan had already been cut off from it) in order that Japanese strength could concentrate in Manchuria against the USSR which, he expected, would move between late June and early August. Ambassador Kase in Berne bluntly advised Tokyo to end the war: "Renounce all the consolations of self intoxication and keep foremost in mind the necessity of seeing truth as it actually is."<sup>23</sup> And "Russia is not going to sacrifice her relations with the Allies for anything we can offer."<sup>24</sup>

In May 1945 the Kwantung army headquarters began to report a steady increase in the number of Soviet forces moving into eastern Siberia, although in the opinion of the Kwantung command this did not necessarily presage war between the USSR and Japan. By this time the Kwantung army was a shell of poorly armed, reserve border garrisons. The trained divisions of that army had been transferred to bolster the defenses of the homeland or had been lost in the western Pacific campaigns. It is noteworthy that the common denominator of the dispatches to Tokyo from Moscow, Berne, and Lisbon was the strong opinion that the USSR would use the war to lever herself into domination of as much of Eurasia as possible whether or not she actually warred on Japan. Kase was even of the opinion that the USSR

would double-cross Great Britain and the United States to achieve this dominance. Okamoto from Stockholm added his belief that the USSR and the USA would "in the future come into conflict on the Chinese continent,"<sup>25</sup> and that "the British and Americans once having forced Japan to surrender, unconditionally, should then impose generous terms upon her in order to make use of Japan against the Soviet Union."<sup>26</sup>

On 21 May 1945 Sato, at the direction of the Foreign Ministry, sought an interview with Molotov. The purpose was to find out whatever he could concerning Soviet intentions toward Japan. He met with Molotov on 29 May, and, in a telling phrase, he was "like a spaniel in the presence of a mastiff who also knows where the bone is buried."<sup>27</sup> Sato, in no doubt as to the intentions of the USSR, urged Togo to make concessions which Togo was now only too willing to do if he only knew which ones to make and if he could persuade the army command to agree. On 8 June 1945 Sato, on edge from Molotov's war of nerves, wrote Togo that there was little hope or reason for him to continue to sound out Molotov. Soviet-Japanese relations, bad since Portsmouth, were at their worst now, and with Japan coming under attack from US land-based air, there was little to hope for. If the USSR entered the war Japan would have "to eat dirt."<sup>28</sup> By late June, Togo came to agree with Sato's dietary prophecy, but he could offer no better advice than "make a desperate effort to obtain a more favorable relationship."<sup>29</sup> The Togo-Sato dialogue was being carried out at a time when there was an increasing buildup of Soviet men and armor on the Amur border. Togo was certain that sooner or later a cause for war would be presented to the USSR by the "arrogant" Japanese army, the "unyielding" navy, or the "officious and truculent police," "all of whom have been the despair of the Japanese Foreign Ministry in its efforts to propitiate the USSR."<sup>30</sup>

Togo's increasing worry came from a growing division within the ranks of Japan's senior statesmen. On 18 July 1944, ten days after the fall of Saipan, the Tojo cabinet

resigned. The breaching of the last line of defense before the homeland was only in part the reason for the withdrawal from power of those who had held it since 20 October 1941. It was also, in substantial part, the penultimate result of steady but quiet pressure from those in high places who had originally opposed the war or who had, since May 1942, come to oppose it.

With the end of the battle for Saipan, these men knew that Japan was defeated. Among them was Rear Admiral Takagi Soichi of the naval general staff, whose careful study of the war to early 1944 had convinced him that it could not be won and that Japan should negotiate a peace. His opinion was known among the *Jushin*, an informal body of elder senior statesmen who retained very close connections with government. Some of these men were instrumental in effecting the resignation of Tojo, who was succeeded by Koiso Kuniaki, a former chief of staff of the Kwantung army and a former governor general of Korea. The new Prime Minister was given a euphemistic responsibility by the Emperor "to fundamentally reconsider things."<sup>31</sup> That is, presumably, to seek an end to the war. Koiso created a Supreme Council for the Direction of the War chaired by the Emperor himself (should he deign to attend). This was a six-member inner group of the cabinet with absolute authority to prosecute war and peace. At its first meeting, in August 1944, it considered how to end the war. The Japanese army command was resolutely set against peace and was the chief force against an end to the war, even though the objective for which the war had started, the Southern Resources Area, had been lost to Japan. One question before the group was whether Japan should voluntarily yield Korea and Formosa after withdrawing from China and Manchuria. The decision taken was to continue the war, hoping that Japan's position in it could be improved to the point where a compromise peace could be had.

In February 1945, Prince Konoe Fumimaro was selected by the *Jushin* as the one who would negotiate with the United States. At an Imperial audience in April 1945,

Konoe told the Emperor that the war was lost and that Japan would do well to surrender providing the Imperial institution was retained. Dreadful as defeat was, Japan could recover herself under an Emperor. The alternative was a communist revolution in Japan. This was not a farfetched prophecy, he said, when one considered on the one hand the rapid rise to power and reputation of the USSR and on the other the belief of the many radical younger officers of the armed service that communism was compatible with the Japanese system (indeed, this belief had taken root in the late 1920s and risen to flourish among the army and navy since the Manchurian Incident). Konoe urged an immediate peace. The Emperor agreed. But neither man had any idea then as to how to bring it about in the face of the implacable opposition of the military extremists.<sup>32</sup>

**K**oiso resigned the premiership on 8 April 1945 after the homeland had been breached with the invasion of Okinawa. He was succeeded by Admiral Baron Suzuki Kantaro, who was known to be without any attachments that would prevent him from seeking peace. In a very real sense, the appointment of Suzuki was the beginning of surrender. While it had been realized that the war was lost after the defeat at Saipan in 1944, the conviction that an immediate peace had to be sought became real after Okinawa and after an independent and courageous man, Suzuki, was given the Emperor's command, on 22 June 1945, to bring the war to an end.<sup>33</sup> There were three barriers to peace. First, the concurrence of the Japanese army had to be gotten because to the end there remained a real danger of an attempted military coup to prevent surrender. Second, somehow the Allies had to agree to the preservation and continuation of the Imperial institution. Third, a go-between had to be found to mediate the second condition. To the end of seeking a mediator, on 8 June 1945 the Emperor asked the council to send an envoy to the Soviet Union. On 19 June 1945, Hirota Koki, a former Prime Minister, ardent nationalist, and able diplomat (and the only civilian defendant condemned to death by the

International Military Tribunal for the Far East) discussed with Soviet Ambassador Jacob Malik a new treaty of nonaggression and mutual assistance between Japan and the USSR wherein Japan would pledge to renounce her fishing rights in Soviet waters and to withdraw her troops from and neutralize Manchuria. Malik transmitted the offer to Moscow.

On 10 July 1945 Togo told Sato that following a series of conferences at the "highest level," "we are secretly giving consideration to the termination of the war" and that he was to "sound out the extent to which it is possible to make use of Russia with regard to the end of the war."<sup>34</sup> Despite the desperation of the circumstance, Sato was advised when talking to Molotov, "not to give the impression that our plan is to make use of the Russians in ending the war."<sup>35</sup> Molotov was to be told that if the war were to be terminated, Japan "has absolutely no idea of annexing or holding the territories occupied as a result of the war out of concern for the establishment and maintenance of a lasting peace."<sup>36</sup> On 12 July, Sato received a message, the first paragraph of which was to be read to Molotov:

His Majesty the Emperor, mindful of the fact that the present war daily brings greater evil and sacrifice upon the peoples of all the belligerent powers, desires from his heart that it may be quickly terminated. But so long as England and the United States insist upon unconditional surrender in the Greater East Asia War the Japanese Empire has no alternative but to fight on with all its strength for the honor and existence of the motherland. His Majesty is deeply reluctant to have any further blood lost among the people on both sides for this reason and it is his desire, for the welfare of humanity, to restore peace with all possible speed.

The will of the Emperor as expressed above rises not only from his benevolence toward his own subjects but from his concern for the welfare of humanity in general. It is his private intention to send Prince Konoye to

your place as Special Envoy and have him take with him a letter from the Emperor containing the above statements. Please inform Molotov of this and get the consent of the Russians to having the party enter the country. (I shall telegraph names of party later.) Now, though it would be impossible to have this delegation get to your place before the big men in Moscow leave for the Three Power Conference, we must arrange for a meeting immediately after their return, so we should like to have the trip made by plane if possible. Please try to arrange for a Soviet plane to go as far as Manchouli or Tsitsihar.<sup>37</sup>

Sato replied that there was no hope the Soviets would consent to mediate. The terms proposed "run completely counter to their foreign policy."<sup>38</sup> The Soviets, he continued, were not about to do Japan any favors, certainly not when their ally, the United States, has taken the Philippines and Okinawa. They were too realistic to be persuaded with abstracts or with "pretty little phrases."<sup>39</sup> "If," continued Sato, "the Japanese Empire is really faced with the need to end the war, we must first of all make up our own minds to terminate the war."<sup>40</sup> Once the resolve to terminate had been made, then perhaps the USSR would offer its good offices. "But there can be no doubt that the result which faces us in that event will be virtually equivalent to unconditional surrender."<sup>41</sup> "I send this telegram in the belief that it is my first responsibility to prevent the harboring of illusions which are at variance with reality."<sup>42</sup> Sato had had an interview with Molotov on 11 July unaware of the message enroute to him concerning the Emperor's wish and the Special Envoy. He pressed on Molotov, simply and directly, Japan's desire for a treaty of nonaggression between Russia and Japan as a "mark of lasting friendship"<sup>43</sup> between the two and an "instance of their cooperation in the maintenance of permanent peace in East Asia."<sup>44</sup> To those ends Japan would withdraw from Manchuria, making it neutral. Molotov remained noncommittal. When Sato

returned to the Embassy he wrote Togo that there was no possibility of the USSR accepting any Japanese request since Japan's crisis was so acute that "they even believe that they hold complete power of life and death over Japan."<sup>45</sup> He emphasized to Togo the essential absurdity of proposing these negotiations since "the whole question of the neutralization of Manchukuo is based on the assumption that Japan and Manchukuo will continue to exist."<sup>46</sup> Further, "our own uneasiness will be made glaringly apparent and [Russia] will thus be less inclined than ever to accept our proposition."<sup>47</sup> He believed that the best Japan could hope for would be that Russia remain just as she was. Anything else, certainly the idea that Japan could get her to desert her allies, "is nothing but pinning our hopes on the utterly impossible."<sup>48</sup> He reiterated his warning that unless the Special Envoy brought an unconditional surrender, he might as well stay home. On 13 July 1945 Sato managed to get a meeting with S. A. Lozovsky, the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs. He was informed that Stalin and Molotov had left for Berlin (although Stalin did not leave until 15 July) and the matter would be brought to their attention when they returned.

Despite Sato's explicit advice, repeated again and again, Togo persisted in telling him that Japan had no recourse but to seek the good offices of the USSR to end the war, but that at the same time Japan was resolved not to surrender unconditionally. On 19 July 1945 (the Potsdam Conference was still in session) Sato was informed by the Soviet Foreign Office that the USSR declined to receive the Special Envoy since his mission was "in no way made clear."<sup>49</sup> Sato transmitted this to Togo in an acerbic message that stated, "It is, nevertheless, hard to deny that the powers that be in Japan are out of touch with the atmosphere prevailing here."<sup>50</sup>

**O**n 20 July 1945 Sato wrote that there was no hope for Japan. He was correct. The remnants of the Japanese navy had either been destroyed off Okinawa or were tied up in home waters without sufficient fuel. US naval bombardment

forces were shelling Japanese coastal industrial areas. US air power had severed Hokkaido from Honshu and was bombing Japanese cities at will. The homeland was surrounded, hungry, and impoverished. Its civil population had been kept at warlike tension since the seizure of Manchuria in 1931 and was weary in mind and body. The enemy would one day attempt a landing, wrote Sato, and "it is also clear what the Russians will do after our fighting strength has been destroyed."<sup>51</sup> He thought it possible that the Americans would attempt to destroy the autumn rice crop in the paddies, thus leading to "absolute famine."<sup>52</sup> In his long, clear, and utterly frank appraisal of 20 July 1945, Sato spoke of the people of Japan, who "as a whole will not, of course, lay down their arms until the last mile has, literally, been reached. Nevertheless all our officers, soldiers and civilians . . . cannot save the Imperial House by dying a glorious death on the field of battle."<sup>53</sup> Therefore, make peace, resign yourself to the worst. Japan must endure any sacrifice as long as she safeguards the national structure. Sato then turned to the roots of the situation. From his lengthy analysis two sentences completely describe Japanese politics and policies during his generation: "Since the Manchurian Incident Japan has followed a policy of expediency. When it came to the East Asia War, we finally plunged into a great World War which was beyond our strength."<sup>54</sup>

As was to be expected, Togo replied that Japan could never surrender unconditionally and to avoid so doing, it was necessary to obtain the good offices of the Soviet Union. At the same time that Sato was forcefully and consistently advising unconditional surrender and Togo was just as forcefully and consistently asserting that the surrender should not be unconditional, the Japanese envoys in Berne and Stockholm were advising unconditional surrender. Okamoto in Stockholm wanted an end to a war where "we miscalculated and belittled the enemy's actual strength and . . . are now in the midst of an impossible, unreasonable war which has made practically the whole world our enemy."<sup>55</sup> Minister Kase in Berne added that

as he understood it, unconditional surrender meant to Americans a more lenient attitude than Tokyo assumed. His opinion was based on a public statement made 10 July 1945 by Undersecretary of State Joseph Brew, which said in part, "unconditional surrender does not mean, as the President pointed out in his message of June 1, the destruction or enslavement of the Japanese people."<sup>56</sup> On 25 July Togo, contrary to the advice of his envoys, directed Sato again to see Molotov and to explain the pacific intentions of the Japanese government and to endeavor to stress that Japan went first to the USSR with her request for mediation. Sato was to emphasize that receiving the Special Envoy would enable Stalin to acquire the reputation of an advocate of world peace and "further, that we are prepared to meet fully the Russian demands in the Far East."<sup>57</sup>

It was all so futile. The USSR had no intention of assisting their old antagonists with their convulsive peace efforts. They never had any such intention. Since 1943 Stalin had intended to come into the war against Japan as soon as Germany was finished. In October 1944 he set the time as within three months of the German defeat. On 28 May 1945 he told Harry Hopkins that he would attack Manchuria sometime after 8 August. He added that Japan would not unconditionally surrender and would have to be destroyed.<sup>58</sup> He noted that the Japanese had put out peace feelers during the spring and summer of 1945 and were feverishly anxious to get Russia to mediate with the United States and Great Britain. The government of the United States was equally aware of the state of Japan. The decision-makers had at hand every bit of the information contained in this article and much more. On 14 June 1945 Washington had notified Nimitz and MacArthur that Japan might precipitately surrender. On 28 July 1945, two days after the issuance of the Potsdam Declaration which called for the unconditional surrender of Japan, Stalin informed his allies that he had again received a Japanese proposal for a Soviet-Japanese meeting in Moscow on how to bring the war to an end and that this would be refused, as

was a former request. On 21 July 1945 Nimitz and MacArthur had been informed that Soviet entry into the war would probably take place on 15 August.<sup>59</sup> Circumstances were to advance that date.

With the United States unable to bring to a halt the momentum of attack until Japan surrendered, but with the government of Japan paralyzed in its effort to seek peace by the prospect of, as they understood unconditional surrender, national extinction, and with the Japanese army absolutely opposed to any surrender, the United States had but one alternative to the planned assaults on Kyushu and Honshu with their projected fearful casualties on both sides. On 29 July 1945 Radio Tokyo announced that Japan intended to ignore the Potsdam Declaration, although Article One had stated "Japan shall be given an opportunity to end the war." Prime Minister Suzuki and Foreign Minister Togo were willing to subscribe to the declaration. The remainder of the Supreme Council and the army and the navy command refused and still clung to the illusion of going through Moscow. Hearing nothing from Japan, the United States, as it had promised its allies it would do, exploded an atomic bomb over Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. On 7 August 1945 Togo sent a very urgent dispatch to Sato: "The situation is becoming more and more pressing, and we would like to know at once the explicit attitude of the Russians. So will you put forth still greater efforts to get a reply from them in haste."<sup>60</sup> Late the next afternoon, Molotov handed Sato a declaration of war effective 9 August 1945. This was six days before Stalin's promised entry into the war and eight months before the expiry of the abrogated Treaty of Neutrality, and before the conclusion of an agreement with China which Stalin had stated at Potsdam was necessary before Russia could enter the war.<sup>61</sup>

For reasons still not explained, Togo did not hear of the declaration of war from Sato until 15 August 1945. On 9 August 1945 an atom bomb had been exploded over Nagasaki. On 10 August 1945, the Soviet Ambassador in Tokyo formally handed him the declaration. In this declaration the USSR

explained its action as being consistent with the obligation of the USSR under Article 103 of the new United Nations Charter. On this same 10 August Togo sent a surrender to Berne and to Stockholm and asked that Kase in Berne transmit it to Washington and Chungking, and that Okamoto in Stockholm transmit it to London and Moscow. All Japanese representatives abroad were advised of the surrender and told that the Japanese army and navy agreed. That evening the Japanese people learned of it. On 11 August 1945 the Japanese minister in Berne transmitted to Tokyo the reply of the four powers concerned. The powers refused to consider anything but an unconditional surrender and most particularly refused to maintain the prerogatives of the Emperor as Togo had requested. "From the moment of surrender the authority of the Japanese Government to rule the State shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers."<sup>62</sup> On 14 August 1945 Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration and surrendered unconditionally. That same day the Emperor broadcast to his people the need for surrender.

But there remained a most delicate and dangerous situation in Japan, in China, in Korea, and indeed wherever Japanese armed forces were stationed. Neither the army nor the navy wanted to surrender. On 12 August 1945 the army general staff had announced "their resolute determination to continue their efforts . . . even if it meant their destruction."<sup>63</sup> On 14 August 1945 the navy vice chief of staff and the navy vice minister announced their "firm determination to prosecute our holy war to the last man."<sup>64</sup> In China the commander-in-chief, China Expeditionary Force, with a large and undefeated army under his command, was not disposed to lay down his arms. The army had made substantial plans to defend Honshu and Kyushu beach by beach, area by area, region by region. Sometime during 14 August the Emperor spoke personally to the navy minister and to the army minister. On 15 August 1945, the Emperor broadcast directly to the armed forces. On the 16th the navy was directed to obey the Emperor—which it did. The same order went out to the army from

the Minister of War's office. On 16 August the army general staff ordered an end to all air actions. On 17 August 1945 General Okamoto ordered the army in China to cease fire. The war was over.

#### NOTES

A powerful weapon against Japan during the war in the Pacific was the ability of the United States to read Japanese communications. Diplomatic messages were a significant part of these communications. Recently these highly classified messages were made available to scholars. I am grateful to my friend Donald M. Showers for bringing their availability to my attention. These documents enable us to fill in a number of gaps and clarify a number of ambiguities about the last year of the war and to see how extended, complicated, and various was the Japanese surrender.

1. The Problem of the Prolongation of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality-Pact (PSIS-400-3), Publication of Pacific Strategic Intelligence Section, Commander in Chief United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, 12 February 1945, pp. 2-3. There is a story that Stalin, upon signing, told Matsuoaka, "Now you can move South."
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 12a.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 14. This conference organized the United Nations.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
7. *The Entry of the Soviet Union into the War Against Japan: Military Plans: 1941-1945* (Washington: Department of Defense, 1955), Bradley to Chief of Staff, October 1943, p. 13.
8. *Ibid.*, Dean to Vice Chief of Staff, 31 October 1943, p. 22, and Ambassador Harriman to President, 15 December 1944, p. 27.
9. PSIS 400-3, p. 21.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 24. See also n. 32.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
13. Abrogation of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact (PSIS 400-8), 23 April 1945, p. 2.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 11. Nomonhan was a full-scale battle, started by local Japanese commanders, between the USSR and Japan, 10-31 August 1939, on the outer Mongolian frontier. It was of divisional size, and Soviet tanks and dive bombers inflicted enormous casualties on the Japanese.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
19. Japanese Reaction to German Defeat (PSIS 400-12), 21 May 1945, pp. 1-2.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
22. Russo-Japanese Relations (PSIS 400-16), 18 June 1945, p. 5.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
28. Russo-Japanese Relations (June 1945) (PSIS 400-18), 2 July 1945, p. 7.

29. Ibid., p. 9. By the end of June, Okinawa was lost and Tokyo, Kobe, and Osaka were in ruins. Still, the army command remained confident of eventual victory.

30. Ibid., p. 11.

31. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Japan's Struggle to End the War*, 1 July 1946, p. 3.

32. Ibid., p. 21. Also USSBS, "Interrogation #373, Prince Konoye, Tokyo, November 5, 1945." The compatibility of communism—understood as the liquidation of oppressive cartels and monopolies and an ensuing economic egalitarianism under state direction—with the Emperor system had taken root in the depressed 1920s and 1930s among many junior officers of both services but especially of the army. They were stimulated by the writings of Kita Terajiro (Kita Ikki), nurtured by a subsistence economy for the many which included child labor, and encouraged by the authoritarian and expansionist dreams of many highly placed officers and civil authorities. In many respects Yale C. Maxon, *Control of Japanese Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Civil-Military Relations 1930-1945*, is the fundamental book on this important subject. Still of great value is the pioneer study by Royal J. Wald, "The Young Officers Movement in Japan, ca. 1925-1937, Ideology and Actions," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of California at Berkeley, 1949. And note Michio Takeyama, *Showa no Seishinshi* (The Spirit of Our Times) (Tokyo: 1956).

33. USSBS, p. 6.

34. Tokyo to Moscow, 11 July 1945; Moscow to Tokyo, 12 July 1945; unpaginated cables, SRDJ 105663.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. "Magic" diplomatic extracts, July 1945, "Selected items prepared by War Department for the attention of General George C. Marshall, SRH 040," p. 11.

44. Ibid., p. 14.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., p. 15.

48. Ibid., p. 16.

49. Ibid., p. 33.

50. Ibid., p. 40.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., p. 41.

53. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

54. Ibid., p. 45.

55. Ibid., p. 62.

56. Ibid., p. 66.

57. Ibid., p. 77.

58. *The Entry of the Soviet Union into the War Against Japan*, p. 72.

59. Ibid., p. 102.

60. Japan's Surrender Maneuvers (PSIS 400-29), 29 August 1945, p. 1. The United States heard nothing from Japan concerning the Potsdam terms partly because the council less Suzuki and Togo were afraid, in the presence of each other, to utter the word "surrender" or to admit that Japanese could or would surrender. Suzuki mentioned after the war that the council was capable when considering this matter of simply sitting in silence with each civilian afraid to say what was on his mind. The attitude of the military is more understandable. Japanese military doctrine since the 19th century absolutely forbade any surrender unless approved by each

successive commanding officer. This means that not the smallest unit in the Japanese army could surrender until the ultimate commanding officer, the Emperor, had approved. (Article 15, Combat Regulations of the Field Service Regulations of 1890.) This explains somewhat the contempt in which Japanese troops held surrendered enemies and their mistreatment of enemy prisoners of war and enemy civilians. It also explains why Japanese prisoners of war were considered as "lost." In this apocalyptic moment in August 1945 the council, through Suzuki, tried to buy a day or two more time to again try the Soviet gambit. What Suzuki actually meant in the Domei report that said Japan was not interested was that he had no comment on the allied terms at the present time.

61. Soviet troops crossed the Manchurian border on 8 August 1945, 24 hours before war was to begin, and while the Treaty of Neutrality was still in force. Yet, at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials one of the charges made against Japan was that she had violated the Neutrality Treaty. Had not the USSR entered the war immediately upon the explosion of the Hiroshima bomb, there might have been no war and hence no spoils of war. The entry of the USSR into the war was of the greatest importance in the history of East Asia. The Russians in Manchuria dismantled the Japanese industrial machine, the largest in China, and sent it home for "reparations." This deprived China of her most important heavy industry. The Russians acted as the quartermaster for the Chinese communist forces in Manchuria, turning over to them arms and ammunition taken from the surrendered Japanese. Strategic areas of Manchuria were given over to the Chinese communist forces. Korea was occupied north of the 38th parallel and, contrary to agreement with the United States, was sealed off from the southern half of Korea. The USSR took southern Karafuto, which they had once ceded to Japan, as well as the Kurile Islands, to which they had no claim whatever, and thus dominated the northwest Pacific and Hokkaido. It was all in all the greatest free lunch in the history of war.

62. PSIS 400-29, p. 43. An almost minute-to-minute log of the actions of the council and the Emperor during the period 9-14 August can be found in Soichi Oya, ed., *Nihon no Ichiban Nagai Hi* (Japan's Longest Day) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjo Shinsha, 1965). An informal but highly informed day-to-day history of the prewar period and the war ran in Mainichi newspapers from January to June 1975. A kind of encyclopedic coverage of the present reign was done by the newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* in *Showa Shi No Shunkan* (Key Moments in the History of the Showa Era) (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun-Shu, 1974), 2 vols. What is of interest is that at 2:10 on 13 March, Okamoto cabled from Stockholm that the United States had overridden Soviet objections and would not depose the Emperor. This, of course, answered the fundamental objection of the council.

63. Ibid., p. 21.

64. Ibid. I have never seen any recognition of the unique nature of the war against and victory over Japan. The Germans were driven out of the areas they occupied and garrisoned (North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, Russia, Eastern Europe) and their armies destroyed until, at the end, the power of the Allies was focused on one bunker in Berlin. With Japan the opposite took place. The United States bypassed large areas of enemy troops in a strategy that selected for assault air bases from which the heartland itself could be placed under constant attack while, at the same time, that heartland was increasingly isolated by submarine blockade from its armies abroad. When the last moment came for surrender there were undefeated Japanese armies in Indonesia (500,000); Indochina (including Thailand, 200,000); China, Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan (2,000,000). Had they chosen to ignore the surrender of the homeland, their decision to stand and fight would have kept

East and Southeast Asia in turmoil and misery for a long time. They could have been defeated but not until great efforts had been made by the Allies and great casualties had been suffered by both sides, and by the innocent occupied civilians of these lands. That is why the Emperor's direct appeal and command to these armed forces was of such a critical nature, equal to the surrender itself. Over the next year these forces were, with one exception, repatriated. Even the Chinese, who had long suffered under the Japanese, promptly and humanely sent the armies in China home. The one exception is the army in Manchuria, which was sent into Soviet labor camps.

The same failure to recognize the scope and nature of the war in the Pacific leads to confusion regarding the role of the atomic bomb in the surrender. The USSBS was of the opinion that "the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs did not defeat Japan . . . [but] they did foreshorten the war and expedite the peace." I am inclined to agree with this judgment but not with: "It is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945 and in all probability prior to November 1945 Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war,

and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated." I don't know who came to that judgment in July 1946. I long ago became convinced that absent the A-bombs and the Soviet declaration of war, the planned invasion of Kyushu (1 November 1945) and of Honshu (spring 1946) would have been sternly resisted. Although the United States had absolute control of the sea and practical control of the air, the Japanese, weary and hungry, would have struggled with all the courage they had shown in last-ditch stands from Burma to Okinawa.

We would have had almost to destroy the Japanese nation. I inspected the beaches around Kagoshima Wan and Ariaki Wan in fall 1945. It was difficult terrain well utilized by the Japanese defense. I spoke with officers of the 16th Area Army responsible for the defense of Kyushu. They had anticipated where we would land. They had 14 divisions and five brigades for the defense. Each prepared defensive position had food and ammunition for one month. Clearly American casualties would have been enormous. The Soviet declaration and the A-bombs forestalled this. I cannot complain. I was assigned to the Kyushu operation.

