The Decision for Peace

Interrogation of Sakonichi, Histotan, a career government official, and Chief Cabinet Secretary in the Suzuki cabinet, from a report of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey.

Q. When was the Suzuki Cabinet appointed?
A. April 7, 1945.

Q. Why was there any question as to whether his Cabinet would consider ways of making peace?
A. The Prime Minister, Mr. Suzuki, denied the possibility of our continuing the war, so right after the Cabinet was formed he ordered me to examine into the details of the Japanese fighting power and to advise whether it was sufficient to continue the war. I reached the conclusion at the end of April, rather the beginning of May, that Japan could not continue the war.

Q. What factors led you to this conclusion?
A. Our inability to manufacture airplanes, the amount of factory damage from bombing, ship losses and damage, the food situation, and the sentiment of the people. The official government propaganda always insisted on ultimate victory of Japan, but the people had doubt because at the time of the Okinawa battle the military said that they could defend Okinawa, but Okinawa fell. When the first B-29s came to Tokyo, Army fighter planes went up and tried to fight them, but as the raid continued, the number of defending fighter planes was gradually less and less. The people saw this, and it gave them some idea of the fighting power of the United States. There were so many rumors that the fall crop was going to be destroyed by American bombs that they were very nervous about their food.

Q. Do the Cabinet and the Prime Minister usually take the sentiment of the people into consideration in their deliberations?
A. They should but usually they do not. Tojo did it; he is clear. Suzuki did not. At the very beginning of his government he asked the Emperor how he thought about the war. I think the Emperor knew the people did not want to continue the war, that their sentiment was anticlimate. I guess the Emperor told Mr. Suzuki this well. So Suzuki ordered me to make the investigations which I have told you about.

Q. By what means did the Emperor know that the people did not want to continue the war?
A. He read the sentiments through the people, through meetings with the former Prime Minirists, for example, my father-in-law, [Adm. Keisuke Chida], who are sort of elder statesmen.

Q. Did the Emperor have access to the foreign relief?
A. I don't think so. Then also there were the members of the Imperial Household Ministry who were always against war.

Q. How did you go about finding out the sentiment of the people?
A. I listened to what they said, in the restaurants, on the streets, and so on. They did not know the number of airplanes we had, or the iron manufacturing capacity, but they could feel what the situation was. You can't stop them from feeling, you know.

Q. Did you have any organized method, like the Gallup system?
A. No, there was no organization. But I saw so many people every day. As many as 20 or 30 people came to see me every day. I knew well what the actual position was with regard to Japan's manufacturing capacity, because I was an officer of the Cabinet Planning Board at one time.

Q. How long?
A. 1911-12 and 1913-14, during part of the Tojo and part of the Koki cabinets. When I was in the Tojo cabinet, I tried to break it up. You know, there is an old Japanese proverb which says that an insect was inside the lion and the lion was killed by the insect. Hoshino (Nomu) Hoshino, head of Cabinet Planning Board under one of Koki cabinets, and Tojo's Chief Cabinet Secretary, said to some of my colleagues that he thought Sakonichi was the insect inside the lion.

Q. You were not happy working with Hoshino?
A. No, but I knew him very well. We were both in the Finance Ministry together before the Manchuria incident. I guess he wanted me in the Planning Board because he knew I had some skill in planning. I planned many things, but I always moved most of them, and especially Tojo would not listen to anything about the sentiment of the people. I thought Tojo did not know how to stop the war. He knew how to start one, but not how to stop it. You know, when I was learning to drive a car in...
New York, she told me that before I could learn to drive the car I must first learn how to stop it. Before Tojo the cabinet breakers were always Resident, Resident without any name. They have played a particularly important role in Japanese history, and always they have been connected with the military. Under Tojo, all the Resident were to be left to him because he was the military's man. Under Tojo they cleared him.

Of course, I could not indulge in any propaganda against Tojo, because I was in the Cabinet, but I believe that Okada and I were the center of opposition to Tojo. It took just 1 year to do it.

You may wonder why Okada disliked Tojo so much. I shall tell you the story. Before the war Tojo gathered together all the former Prime Ministers and explained why they were going to start the war. Okada, Adm. Mitsumasa Yonai, and Boro Reiji Watanabe did not agree. Okada asked Tojo about the condition of Japan's merchant shipping. Tojo explained that we might lose 10,000 tons per month, and I don't remember the exact amount of food construction he mentioned, but he said it was not enough to make up for what was lost. Okada said his estimate was wrong. And the fact was that Okada was right. It was as he said. We lost, well, maybe 300,000 or 300,000 tons per month. Our capacity for building was 300,000 tons, but we couldn't build that much because we didn't have the materials. There were many, many shipyards which were idle during the war for this reason. So Okada said that Tojo is a liar, that is, he is lying. No, that is not the word, that he has no sense for estimating the facts.

Q: You said a few minutes ago that it took just a year to accomplish your project against Tojo. I wonder if you would give us the story of what happened in that year?

A: First we talked to [Marquis Kishida] Kido [Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal] because he could nominate the Prime Minister. Of course, the Emperor formally nominated him, but it was Kido who actually did it. And when we asked Tojo, that it would be best for him to resign. Tojo decided to resign his cabinet because Mr. Kishi [Prime Minister] Kishi, Minister of Commerce and Industry] and [Masaoka] Shigeo, came over to our side. This was just before the Mushika campaign. Tojo asked Yonai to be Minister without portfolio. Okada called a meeting of the former Prime Ministers, and they decided that Yonai should not be in the cabinet. The Kishi government, so Tojo was compelled to resign. General

Okada accepted his invitation, but Tojo could not stand up against the solid opposition of the former Prime Ministers.

Okada tried to get them to build a Cabinet of peace-minded people, and the Army fought against it. Kishi was an old soldier, but outside of the government he had been very critical of Tojo, so we expected that Kishi might do something, but he was not strong enough to fight the military. I think it was a pity that Kishi ever came in as Prime Minister.

Then Suzuki was appointed. His nomination meant a change in the tendency of operation of the government. The Emperor for the first time could express his own opinions, I think. Many of the lower officials of the government, like me, had had official conferences in which we might say something like, "How can we continue the war without us?" Next day the Kempei would come to my office and say, "We hear that at a meeting last night you expressed doubt of final victory."

All were afraid of the Kempei. Well, I came to the conclusions I have told you about before, and Suzuki declared I was right. He went to the Emperor and came back a short while later. He said to me that we must start some steps toward peace. This was in the middle of May. So we asked Kishi, Kishi [former Prime Minister] to speak with the Russian Ambassador [Joseph Alex andorich] Malkin in private conversation. He did so on several occasions, sounding out the Russian attitude toward reconciling with America. In the beginning it looked as might be successful, but the talks never reached a successful conclusion. In May Germany collapsed, as you know, and after that the War Minister [Gen. Keiichiro Amano] asked the Cabinet for a conference in the presence of the Emperor to decide the fundamental principle of the war—whether to continue it or not. Of course, we [laughing] had had many rehearsals of that meeting.

The military insisted upon continuing, but I and others had different ideas, although we couldn't actually advance the stopping of the war because the MPs were still around. I drafted the memorandum for the conference, and I started with the statement that we should try to accomplish the war and keep the Emperor's reign intact and keep the home land. Of course, the military read it and agreed as meaning that the war should be continued, but it was followed by the detail which I had collected for my report to Mr. Suzuki. The whole thing was presented to the conference in the presence of the Emperor. Those attending were

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the Prime Minister, the war Minister, the Navy Minister (Yosca), the Army Chief of Staff (Gen. Yoshijiro Umezu), the Chief of the Naval General Staff (Admiral Soemu Toyoda), and the Foreign Minister (Shigenori Togo). Each expressed his own opinion, but more expressed his real feelings. But if you read the details of my memorandum, it is clear that the war had to stop. The Emperor himself read the report as well as the others. This was on the ninth of June. At that time the Emperor told nothing.

On the 25th of June the Emperor, by his own will, called a meeting of the Prime Minister and the others. I just mentioned who were in the meeting of June 25th. (At this point S. explained that the Cabinet had to present a written request for permission to hold a conference in the presence of the Emperor, but the Emperor could call me at his own initiative at any time, although he rarely did so.) The Emperor told them that the conclusion in the document presented in the conference of June 25th seemed to be very paradoxical. He knew the real meaning of the conclusion. He said, "I think it is necessary for us to have a plan to close the war at once as well as one to defend the home islands." (S. explained that at that time the Army was making much of the plan to defeat the American forces when they landed on the home islands.)

As a result of this explanation, the Emperor, Suzuki decided to stop the war. After the meeting, Mr. Suzuki came back, and he told me, "Today the Emperor said what everyone wants to say, but it was hard to say." Q. What was the reaction of the military to this decision? A. Yosca understood and approved the idea. The War Minister, Adm. Toyoda, also approved, but he could not express his real feelings of the generals around him and the fear of assassination. After that, the Emperor decided to send Prince Konoye to Moscow and asked Russia if he would be permitted to enter. The Russians said that they would not object, but they received from the Japanese government an express expression of his desire to stop the war. We asked the US to intervene with the United States in order to stop the war. The Russian answer was that Stalin and Molotov were just leaving for the conference at Potsdam, so an answer to the Japanese request could not be given until they returned. We wanted an answer before the conference, but we just couldn't have it, so there was nothing to do but wait. Suzuki and I felt quite pessimistic about the Russian attitude toward our proposal. Then on June 26th came the Potsdam Declaration. Suzuki, Togo, and I talked together, and we felt that this declaration must be accepted as the final terms of peace (surrender), whether we liked it or not. Still the military side of the government said that the terms of the proclamation were "too dishonorable."

On the 7th of August, early in the morning, about 2 o'clock, the bell rang beside my bed. (My house was bombed in April and I moved to my official residence. That was bombed too. My office was in the building, and they took it down.) I moved my bed into my office, and I stayed there 24 hours a day. In the evening when I got dressed, I would put on my hat and walk through the building, return to my office and hang up my hat. That is how the office. At night I would again put on my hat and walk through the building the same way. That was coming home from the office.) When the bell rang beside my bed, it was Daimo telling me that President Truman had announced that the atomic bomb had been used at Hiroshima. I already knew that the Hiroshima damage had been very severe and that it had been caused by just one atom bomb. Everyone said that America had used a new bomb, but they didn't think it was an atomic bomb because our scientists had told us that no country could finish the atomic bomb for some time. The military said that it was probably a 2,000 ton bomb bursting in the air. They made their calculations, but found that a 2,000 ton bomb could not do that much damage. They suggested that it might be a 100,000 ton bomb. After the announcement, we sent some scientists to Hiroshima, and they reported that it was a real atomic bomb.

*Asked in order why the military permitted the approach to Russia if they were bombs. "In the report of the Potsdam Declaration, the Soviet claimed that the War Minister (Adm. Toyoda) had asked for an explanation, but it never told its military staff. For that I advise Mr. Anami. And that is why he committed suicide." He continued, "On the one hand, the military was not sure of the war, and the military had to let the Emperor give the decision that it must be brought to a close. He could have backed the Russian without any harm. It shows his character that he didn't, despite what he knew of our regulations. Yosca of course, always expressed his idea that the war should be stopped, and that is one way of being a brave man. Mr. Anami was another.*
report from Tokyo that he was going to meet with
Mikawa in Tokyo at midnight Japanese time on
August 8. So I was expecting some sort of news.
I felt rather pessimistic about the Russian negotia-
tions, but we didn’t expect a war declaration.
I then got the full text of the war declaration.
I took it to the Prime Minister at about 5 o’clock
in the evening. I told him that there were two
ways for the Cabinet to go:
1. They could resign because they had tried
for peace through the Russians and had failed.
2. They could take some step of a positive
sort.

The Prime Minister said, “If we resign it will take
2 or 3 days for a new cabinet to be formed. The
loss of 2 or 3 days is intolerable, since that
delay of time might decide the national destiny.
It is necessary for us to take some positive step.”

1. To declare war on the Russians and con-
continue the war until the entire nation was de-
stroyed, to the death of the whole nation.
2. To accept the Potsdam Declaration.

Suzuki said he would see the Emperor and he left
about 7 a.m. He came back an hour or two later
and told me that he decided to accept the second
alternative step (Potsdam Declaration) and that the
Emperor’s ideas were the same. He then ordered
me to take the necessary procedures, to make the
proper arrangements.

It was necessary to hold two conferences:
1. A meeting of the Secretaries, or Inner
Cabinet, made up of the Prime Minister, the
Foreign Minister, the War Minister, the Navy
Minister, the Army Chief of Staff, and the
Chief of the Navy General Staff.
2. A meeting of the Cabinet.

The first was held at 10 on the morning of
August 9. Ordinarily I, as the Chief Cabinet Sec-
retary, the Director of the Bureau of Military
Affairs (Lt. Gen. Minoru Yosuda), and the
Director of the Naval Affairs Bureau (Vice Ad-
imiral Yasuio Hashimoto) participated in these
meetings. I suggested to the Prime Minister that
we three should not be included this time, because
if we were, the attending members would not
speak freely. Mr. Suzuki agreed. So they all
had assembled. I took these two out, and I stayed
in the other room. The important thing in my
mind was the fact that I took them out of the room.
I had a very significant meaning. Mr. Anami (War
Minister) had decided himself inside, but he had
to express this decision openly. When I took

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two military assistants, the War Minister saw what was meant, and gave him his chance. On the surface this was a negligible event, but it really is not.
The conference lasted for 3 hours. I walked in two or three times, and each time everyone was sunk deep in his chair, and they said nothing. The atmosphere was very gloomy and very cold. Afterwards the Prime Minister came out and told me that two opinions had been expressed and no agreement had been reached.

1. To accept the Potsdam Declaration unconditionally, with the understanding that the Potsdam Proclamation did not include the requirement that the Emperor's legal position be altered.

2. To accept the Potsdam Declaration with the following conditions: First, that the Allied forces would not occupy the home islands, excepting the small islands off the coast; second, that the Japanese military and naval forces abroad would be withdrawn by the Japanese's own will and disbanded; third, all war crimes should be prosecuted by the Japanese Government.

Suzuki said that he, Venizé, and Togo were in favor of the first opinion; that Anami, Umezu (Army Chief of Staff), and Togo (Chief of Navy General Staff) favored the second opinion.

Then I said, "Let's have the Cabinet conference." He agreed and I arranged it for 1 p.m. Sixteen ministers were in attendance. They were gathered about a big round table. As Chief Secretary, I sat at a small secretarial desk at one side. When the meeting opened, Togo (Foreign Minister) explained the disposition of the former Cabinet meeting. About nine men agreed with the first opinion (Unconditional acceptance of Potsdam Declaration), four with the second opinion (conditional acceptance) and three were on the fence. [These took right positions in that the three conditions in the second opinion were too many, that two were enough, that the Prime Minister should take the decision and the rest should follow.] The Cabinet meeting continued until 8 p.m., with one hour out for dinner. Toward the end I wrote a note to Suzuki suggesting that he had better declare an intervention. This he shortly announced.

The Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister, and I then met in the Prime Minister's room, and I told Suzuki that it was apparent that the Cabinet conference was unable to reach a decision. I asked him what he thought we should do. Then he said,

"How about this? Go to the Emperor, report the conferences in detail, and get the Emperor's own decision." I said that it would be better to have an inner Cabinet meeting in the Emperor's presence, and let all the members express personally their own views. Suzuki agreed, and I proceeded to make the arrangements.

To hold a cabinet meeting in the presence of the Emperor, it is necessary to prepare a document stating the purpose of the meeting, over the signatures of the Prime Minister, the Army Chief of Staff and the Navy Chief of Staff. I wrote this document and got the signatures. It was taken to the Emperor and he agreed to the meeting.

The conference (with the Emperor) was held at 11:30 p.m. (the Cabinet meeting was still at internment). I read the text of the Potsdam Declaration. It was very hard to do because the words of the declaration are very hard; the contents are not cheerful things to read in the presence of the Emperor. Then the Foreign Minister expressed his opinion, and the other members, all of them, expressed theirs, as in the morning conference. About 3 o'clock on the morning of the 10th, the Prime Minister stood up and made the following announcements: "We have discussed this question for a long time and everyone has expressed his own opinion sincerely without any conclusion being reached. The situation is urgent, so any delay in coming to a decision should not be tolerated. I am therefore prepared to ask the Emperor his own wish and to decide the conference's conclusion on that basis. His wish should settle the issue, and the government should follow it."

[At this point Suzuki explained very cursorily that this was a very delicate and unusual procedure, that, under the constitution, the Emperor cannot decide anything by himself, that there is no constitutional procedure for the Emperor to express his wishes in matters of policy, and that the Emperor must always follow the government's advice.]

Suzuki stepped two or three steps away from the Emperor and asked him to express his own opinion. The Emperor just stood looking forward and told Suzuki to go back to his seat. The Emperor then started to express his own opinion: "I agree with the first opinion as expressed by the Foreign Minister. I think I should tell the reasons why I have decided so. Thinking about the world situation and the internal Japanese situation, we cannot continue the war any more, but the destruction of the whole nation. My ancestors and myself have always wished to go forward the nation's welfare and international peace as our prime concern. To continue the war..."
now means that cruelty and bloodshed will still continue in the world and that the Japanese nation will suffer severe damage. So to stop the war on this occasion is the only way to save the nation from destruction and to preserve peace in the world. Looking back at what our military headquarters have done, it is apparent that their performance has fallen far short of the plans expressed. I don't think this discrepancy can be corrected in the future.

But when I think about our stubborn soldiers abroad and of those who died or were wounded in battle, about those who have lost their property or lives by bombing in the home land; when I think of all those sacrifices, I cannot help but feel sad. (Zekunia said that the Emperor used very heavily emotional words in this part of the statement, and because of them the members of the Cabinet cried openly.) I decided that this war should be stopped, however. In spite of this sentiment and for more important considerations.

Mr. Suzuki then said, "The Imperial decision has been expressed. This should be the conclusion of the conference." It was about 3 a.m. on August 10th.

We went back to the Cabinet offices and reconvened the Cabinet meeting. The Prime Minister reported the Emperor's decision. All the members agreed to it and signed the document (advising the Emperor that the Potsdam Declaration should be accepted unconditionally).

I forgot to say that the conference in the presence of the Emperor was attended by (Baron Kitchener) Hiranuma, President of the Privy Council. This he did at the Emperor's special request. A Privy Council resolution is essential for the ratification of the international agreement, such as the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, but there was not time to assemble the full Privy Council. They are old men, living all over the country, and it would have taken a considerable period to assemble them all for a formal session. To save time, I advised the Prime Minister that this should be omitted. So Mr. Suzuki asked the Emperor to call Baron Hiranuma into the meeting. Hiranuma agreed with the first opinion (unconditional acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration), and his agreement was sufficient to constitute acceptance by the Privy Council.

The cable of acceptance was sent early, about 7 o'clock, on the morning of the 11th through the Swedish and Swiss Governments. About 9:00 on the 12th we received a broadcast from San Francisco giving us your government's answer, but we did not receive the official written document through the neutral countries until about 10:00 on the morning of the 15th.

There was little difference between the broadcast version and the official text. We studied the former the whole day on the 12th, the unofficial document. On the afternoon of the 15th, San Francisco broadcasted that the Japanese reply was very late and instructed that in a result it might be necessary to bomb Tokyo. (Meanwhile we had heard from a prisoner of war, A B-29 pilot, that your government planned to use the atomic bomb on Tokyo on the 15th.) I was very much worried. So I asked Doi to broadcast that the Japanese government had not yet received the official reply of the American Government. This broadcast was stopped by the military on the grounds that they were afraid the military forces abroad would pick it up, but that something was going on, and the effects on morale would be serious. The military refused to permit Doi to send anything. I was very afraid of the possibility that the atomic bomb would be used against us again. So on my own responsibility I told Doi to make the broadcast despite the military.

That was about 5 p.m. Fifteen minutes later San Francisco said that they could understand why the Japanese reply was late. Immediately thereafter several high officials of the military came to me and asked me why I had told Doi to issue this broadcast. They had been to the Doi official offices and had been told that I had ordered the broadcast despite the military objections and would take complete responsibility. This conversation was repeated several times with the military officials, but nothing came of it, and no harm was
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done to me. You see, the military were very hard to ease the Emperor's decision to accept the Potsdam Declaration unconditionally.
The official answer of your government was received on the morning of the 13th, as you know. We had a Cabi...
continue the war. No one else took that position.

Then the Emperor spoke. He said: "I believe to one thing on your side (the military's) - I shall explain mine. We have all of you will agree with my opinion. This is very important. You must remember that the Emperor never said to say anything in these conferences. Now he asked that the government agree with the opinion he expressed. This is a great thing in our political history. "My opinion is the same as the one I expressed the other night. The American answer seems to me acceptable." Everything then was decided, and all the members of the conference then realized that Japan had been defeated for the first time in its 3,000-year history. Everyone cried like children. I had intended to write down the Imperial expressions, but I found I could not. Yet, I shall remember the Emperor's words to this day, just like a dream.

The Emperor gave almost the same reasons for his opinion as he had to the former meeting with the smaller group. He expressed his opinion in the reconstruction of Japan. He said that all must cooperate together. He then asked the Government to draft the Imperial Rescript to stop the war. He said that all the people who would suddenly realize what the military situation is may be surprised. So if the ministers think it would be better, he said, he would speak personally to them over the radio. He said, "If the military and naval forces especially will be shocked, so I will go any place the Ministers want and explain the situation to the soldiers personally." The Emperor was wearing white gloves, and he himself put his hands to his eyes to brush away the tears. To see that, everyone felt that the Emperor had come back to the people from his capture by the military.

The decision was made and the conference was closed. The Cabinet members returned to their office and made the formal decision accepting the American answer. I wanted to draft the Imperial Rescript. Because I remembered his every word, it was not difficult. I put it in the Chinese style of writing. You should read the Rescript very carefully because it gives the Emperor's real statement, unlike the usual Rescript, which is drafted entirely by the Government.

The answer to the American Government was sent out at 2 p.m., and at 11 p.m., the Emperor's broadcast to the people was read out for broadcast.

At 4:30 the next morning (August 15) I was awakened by the sound of machine guns outside the Cabinet offices. At first, I thought it was American planes on a raid, but I soon discovered it was an attack by 300 or 60 Japanese soldiers. I immediately left the building by an underground passage, and went to the Metropolitan Police Headquarters. The machine guns fire lasted only 2 or 5 minutes, they entered the building and, finding no one of any importance around, tried to set fire to it. They left in about 30 minutes and went to the private residence of Mr. Suzuki, which they burned to the ground. Just 5 minutes before they arrived, I had called the Prime Minister, told him of the attack on the Cabinet offices, and suggested that he should get out at once, as it seemed likely that they would go next to his private residence.

At the Metropolitan Police Station I found that the Imperial Household Ministry had been occupied by a military force who were trying to get the record of the Emperor's broadcast and destroy it before it could be put on the air. They did not succeed in locating it. (Gen. Shimazu) Tomatsu (Commander of the Eastern District Army, Tokyo) spoke to the leaders of the group, trying to persuade them to vacate the premises, and he finally succeeded about 7 o'clock in the morning.

At noon on the 15th of August the broadcast of the Emperor's speech to the people was made.

I understand that the attack on the Cabinet offices did not come completely as a surprise to you. A. Informed people suspected that something was going on as early as the 12th or 13th. Posts were put up in the Ginza and elsewhere saying people to kill "the Degeneration of Japan, Suzuk, Sakurada, Vann, Osada, Togo, and Hirohito". Isumin's name was left off all of the posters and leaflets. The police said they were put up by "Reds" who were connected with the military.

Then on the 15th, all the military airplanes came out. They had gone up to attack the B-29's for a long time, but they did not come out, hundreds of them, and spread leaflets saying, "We will continue the war!" and "The Imperial Rescript is a forgery."

For one month, I lived with two policemen at all times, and at the recommendation of the police I changed my sleeping place every night. It was not so bad, but the tire problem was difficult, as it is reminded, and moving all the time I could not get proper rest for me and my two bodyguards.

This was the second time I had been attacked on me, the first being in the February 26 incident, when I was secretary to my father-in-law, Osada, the Prime Minister. Then I talked a marked man, as they were after the Prime Minister himself. This was the second time, when they were really after me. I may not be so lucky the third time.