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Maintaining the Neutrality: Soviet-Japanese Relations, 1941-1945

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MAINTAINING THE NEUTRALITY: SOVIET-JAPANESE RELATIONS, 1941-1945

by

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ABSTRACT

MAINTAINING THE NEUTRALITY:
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In April 1941, the Soviet Union and Japan concluded a five-year neutrality pact. Before the end of the year both nations were embroiled in bitter wars against each other's allies, but not against one another. How did Soviet-Japanese wartime relations preserve this neutrality that lasted nearly four years during World War II? The answers are provided through analysis of both Soviet and Japanese foreign policies while also considering each nation's prospects for winning the war. To this end, timely MAGIC and ULTRA signal intelligence intercepts provide key insights into each government's intentions. Thus, the Special Research History and the Special Research Summary documents available in the Old Dominion Library microfilm room were used extensively in this study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout four years during World War II, 1941-1945, Japan and the Soviet Union maintained a tenuous peace. This was remarkable considering the fact that each nation was at war with the other's allies. Japan was at war with the British and Americans in the Pacific while the Soviets were locked in a bitter struggle against Germany in Europe. The peace that existed between Japan and the Soviet Union revolved around a neutrality pact the two nations concluded in April 1941. One of the first authors on the subject of Soviet-Japanese relations, 1941-1945, termed this pact as the "strange neutrality."[1] Even so, the neutrality that existed between Japan and the Soviets was not maintained easily. Throughout the war, the Japanese continually re-evaluated the value of its military pact with Germany and its neutrality pact with the Soviet Union. Likewise, Soviet foreign policy toward Japan continued to change. This study investigates the four years of Soviet-Japanese neutrality, 1941-1945, and emphasizes the various changes in both nations' foreign policy toward each other. Analysis will show that the continuously changing fortunes of war and the shift in the strategic balance of World War II against the

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[1]George Alexander Lensen, The Strange Neutrality: Soviet-Japanese Relations during the Second World War, 1941-1945 (Tallahassee, FL: Diplomatic Press, 1972), vii.

Axis coalition greatly influenced Japanese relations with the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER II

SOVIET-JAPANESE RELATIONS DURING THE 1930S

During the first thirty years of the twentieth century, Japan increasingly solidified its relationship with Manchuria. Thus, by the time of the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident in September 1931, Japan claimed to hold a "special position" in that portion of East Asia. Japan saw Manchuria and the eastern part of Mongolia as separate territories from the rest of China and considered the maintenance of peace and order in that region to be Japan's responsibility. The island empire also asserted that its special position was founded upon geography and history and so was not subject to international review.[1] In essence, Japan believed that it maintained a sphere of influence over the region, which eventually culminated in the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo in the spring of 1932.

However, the independent nature of Manchukuo was questioned internationally from the beginning. A League of Nations report issued on 2 October 1932 described in length its suspicions. The authors of the report concluded that the creation of the state of Manchukuo was made possible only due to the presence of Japanese civil and military authorities. Furthermore, the study reasoned that in regard

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[1]Tatsuji Takeuchi, War and Diplomacy in the Japanese Empire, with an Introduction by Quincy Wright (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 338-39.

to the above consideration, the new state could hardly be considered genuine in the least.[2] Japan, however, defended its actions in Manchuria and insisted that the establishment of a separate state was the only solution to Sino-Japanese tension at the time. Therefore, Japan pre-empted the League's report by officially recognizing the state of Manchukuo on 15 September 1932, a full two weeks before the report was published.[3] This shrewd Japanese maneuver represented Japan's unwillingness to accept any compromise. As further evidence of this fact, Japan withdrew its delegation from the League of Nations, on 27 February 1933, as it became clear that international recognition for Manchukuo was not forthcoming.[4] Due to the existing international situation, Japanese diplomacy henceforth, especially on the Asian continent, would be predicated on the maintenance of the integrity of Manchukuo.

With Japanese interests firmly established in Manchukuo, a virtual common border was established between the Japanese empire and the Soviet Union. Sharing a common border placed each nation's armies within close proximity.

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[2]Ibid., 394-95. The League organized the Lytton Commission to investigate the dispute between China and Japan regarding the Manchurian Incident of 1931.

[3]Manley O. Hudson, ed., The Verdict of the League: China and Japan in Manchuria (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1933), 52.

[4]Takeuchi, War and Diplomacy, 414-15. Even as late as April 1941, Japan pursued the United States' recognition for Manchukuo.

Manchuria represented the strategic key to the region and Manchukuo symbolized "the Japanese hand on the throat" of the Soviet Far East.[5] Similarly, the Soviet base at Vladivostok, which translated means "rule over the East," was poised like a dagger at the heart of Japan with heavy bombers standing by less than three hours from Tokyo.[6] Therefore, the possibility for confrontation between the two nations increased during the early 1930s.

However, even though the possibility for conflict rose, the likelihood that armed conflict would erupt in the immediate future actually decreased. This was due largely to Soviet foreign policy. When the Manchurian Incident occurred, the Soviets, preoccupied with domestic concerns such as with the first Five-Year Plan, 1928-1933, appeared willing to tolerate Japanese interests.[7] The Soviet Union not only renounced its rights to the Chinese Eastern Railway, but also withdrew the Soviet Far Eastern forces behind the Amur River. However, the Soviets were not so absorbed with internal affairs that they merely ignored Japanese expansionism. On the contrary, beginning in early

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[5]Willard Price, "Japan Faces Russia in Manchuria," The National Geographic Magazine 82 (July-December 1942): 603.

[6]Ibid.; and Hata Ikuhiko, "The Japanese-Soviet Confrontation, 1935-1940," in Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the U.S.S.R., 1935-1940, ed. James William Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 131.

[7]Alvin D. Coox, Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939, vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 74.

1932, the Soviet Far East armies initiated a large-scale military build-up.[8] For its part, Japan planned a military build-up of its own in order to raise the Japanese forces in Manchukuo to equal between seventy and eighty percent the total Soviet force level.[9] However, the increase in Soviet military forces was not reciprocated by a proportional rise in Japanese military personnel as the island empire had planned (see Figure 1). Accordingly, instead of precipitating a border clash, the disparity in troop levels

Figure 1

Japanese and Soviet Military Strengths in the Far East, 1931-1939

	Kwantung Army		Soviet Far Eastern Army	
Year	Total Manpower	Tanks	Total Manpower	Tanks
1931	64,000	-	-	-
1932	94,100	50	-	250
1933	114,100	100	-	300
1934	144,100	120	230,000	650
1935	164,100	150	240,000	850
1936	194,100	150	340,000	1,200
1937	200,000	150	370,000	1,500
1938	220,000	170	450,000	1,900
1939	270,000	200	570,000	2,200

Sources: Coox, Nomonhan, vol. 1, 84, Table 7.1; and Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 131, Table 1.

actually established a detente between the two nations.

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[8]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 131.

[9]Ibid., 132-33.

Thus, with the Soviets focussed upon domestic concerns and the increased pressures of Germany in Europe and Japanese attention centered upon China, both nations temporarily looked elsewhere for their fights.

Nevertheless, after the immediate relaxation of tension following the Manchurian Incident, friction began to build between Japan and the Soviet Union. This seemed inevitable considering the circumstances. Joseph C. Grew, the well-informed United States' ambassador to Japan, 1933-1941, commented at the time that "[t]he Japanese Army's operations [in East Asia] are really aimed at Russia--not at present, but at some time in the future."[10] This was a logical conclusion considering that ever since 1907, Japanese defense policies regarded Russia, then later the Soviet Union, as the most likely enemy. The Japanese army had to be concerned. In fact, Japan's defense policy of 1936 reiterated the notion that the army should prepare for eventual hostilities against the Soviet Union.[11] Likewise, the Japanese navy published several tracts arguing for increased armaments aimed at the Soviets.[12] Therefore, the

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[10]Joseph C. Grew, Ten Years in Japan: A Contemporary Record Drawn from the Diaries and Private and Official Papers of Joseph C. Grew, United States Ambassador to Japan, 1932-1942 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 68.

[11]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 130.

[12]Max Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929-1941, vol. 1, 1929-1936 (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 165.

Japanese attitude added fuel to a fire which needed only a spark to ignite.

Competition over Mongolian People's Republic added further fuel to the Soviet-Japanese bonfire. The Soviet Union considered Outer Mongolia within its own sphere of influence, similar to Japan's special position in Manchuria. Japan actually had recognized Outer Mongolia as a part of the Russian sphere of influence through a secret agreement concluded following the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905.[13] However, the Japanese now demonstrated signs of disregarding Soviet policy. This fact, not lost upon the Soviets, caused the return of Soviet troops to Outer Mongolia in late 1934.[14] Moreover, Outer Mongolia and the Soviet Union concluded a mutual defense agreement on 12 March 1936 in which the Soviet Union declared its intention to defend Outer Mongolia against any outside encroachments.[15] With Japan pledged to the defense of Manchukuo and the U.S.S.R. equally committed to the defense of Outer Mongolia, the situation appeared deadlocked. But, the Japanese persisted with their plans of expansion into East Asia. These problems continued throughout the 1930s and magnified the already tense relations between Japan and the Soviet Union.

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[13]Ibid., 240.

[14]Ibid., 247.

[15]Harriet L. Moore, Soviet Far Eastern Policy, 1931-1945 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), 63-64, 185-86.

The most influential event of the mid-1930s to effect Soviet-Japanese relations was the conclusion of the Anti-Comintern Pact. On the surface, the treaty, ratified between Germany and Japan on 25 November 1936, was aimed at fighting the Communist International, or Comintern. For Japan, the Anti-Comintern Pact represented its first major step at making common cause with Nazi Germany. This initial step paved the way for the Tripartite Pact of 1940, which was the basis for the Axis coalition of Japan, Germany, and Italy. Germany, the Soviet Union's most virulent enemy, and their militant Asian neighbor, Japan, had pledged a measure of mutual cooperation by signing the pact. So, for the U.S.S.R., the Anti-Comintern Pact was an omen. Moreover, the Soviets correctly believed that the pact also contained a secret military agreement.[16] Understandably, Soviet apprehensions heightened as a result. Thus, the Anti-Comintern Pact delineated the path on which future Soviet-Japanese relations would follow.

No matter what the Japanese publicly professed, the Anti-Comintern Pact was distinctly anti-Soviet. The Japanese proclamation revealed much of that nation's true intentions. The official announcement of the pact declared that

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[16]Ohata Tokushiro, "The Anti-Comintern Pact, 1935-1939," in Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the U.S.S.R., 1935-1940, ed. James William Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 38.

> . . . because the Comintern has decided to make Japan and Germany its principal targets, the two countries have adopted a similar stance vis-a-vis the Comintern. . . . Our sole purpose is defense against the Comintern; no special hidden agreement exists, nor is there any intent to form a separate international bloc. It goes without saying that this pact is not directed against any particular country such as the Soviet Union.[17]

However, these words represented the Japanese concept of haragei. This term, meaning a combination of art, mind, and intention, is used to describe the idea of saying one thing, but meaning another.[18] In regards to the Anti-Comintern Pact proclamation, Japan gambled with haragei on an international scale.

The hidden meanings and inconsistencies are revealed by analysis of the brief excerpt quoted above. First and foremost, the Japanese statement that "no special hidden agreement exists" was nothing less than a lie. Germany and Japan had indeed concluded a secret military agreement. The secret protocol outlined a plan that if either Germany or Japan became the target of an unprovoked Soviet attack, the other party would not aid the Soviet Union in any way. Furthermore, Germany and Japan would then consult "to safeguard their common interests."[19] In addition, Japanese diplomats denied rumors that the pact was aimed at the

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[17]Ibid., 266. Appendices 1 and 2 provide documents supporting Ohata's essay.

[18]Robert J. C. Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), 70n.

[19]Ohata, "The Anti-Comintern Pact," 263.

U.S.S.R. as noted in the above citation. Japan feared that if Moscow learned the true nature of the pact, the Soviet delegation would withdraw from the present Soviet-Japanese fisheries treaty negotiations. In fact, this very reason determined Japan's insistence that the secret protocol not be published concurrent with the pact. In other words, Japan preferred to bluff the international community, the Soviets especially, into believing that the Anti-Comintern Pact was purely defensive with blatant lies and euphemistic wordage. The Soviets remained unconvinced of Japanese sincerity and withdrew from the treaty talks anyway on 20 November 1936 and instead merely renewed the fishery rights granted to the Japanese in 1928 for one year.[20] The Soviet Union had called the Japanese bluff.

Soviet-Japanese relations during the latter half of the 1930s were characterized by an undeclared war. The Soviet and Japanese armed forces fought along the Soviet-Manchukuo and Outer Mongolian-Manchukuo borders (see Figure 2). Most of the incidents, however, were considered mere skirmishes. One source stated that there were approximately 150 such incidents between the end of 1931 and 1934, and that rate increased to almost 340 from 1935 to 1936.[21] Another source recognized a Japanese report which admitted nearly 2,400

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[20]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 93.

[21]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 133.

Figure 2

Area of the Amur River, Changkufeng, and Nomonhan Incidents, 1937-1939

Source: Price, "Japan Faces Russia in Manchuria," 607.

incidents by 1938.[22] Thus, the rate of encounters per annum was quite high. Only later did the battles reach strategic proportions. Even then only three incidents; the Amur River, Changkufeng, and Nomonhan, stood out as full scale contests.

The Amur River Incident, June 1937, marked a dangerous turn in the intensity of the frontier fighting between the Soviet Far Eastern armies and the Japanese Kwantung Army. The incident originated as a border dispute near Kanch'atzu where the Amur River formed Manchukuo's northern border with the Soviet Union (see Figure 3). On 19 June 1937 Soviet troops seized two islets in the middle of the Amur River, evicting citizens of Manchukuo in the process, which the Soviet Union claimed were within Soviet territory. Simultaneously, Soviet gunboats engaged a portion of the Manchukuoan army in the vicinity. The Japanese immediately mobilized and dispatched several units of the Kwantung Army to the disputed region. Eventually, the Kwantung Army, disillusioned by the home government's reluctance to escalate the incident, ignored Tokyo's orders and bombarded the Soviet fleet on 29 June, sinking one of the gunboats.[23] This independent act set a dangerous precedent for future Soviet-Japanese relations.

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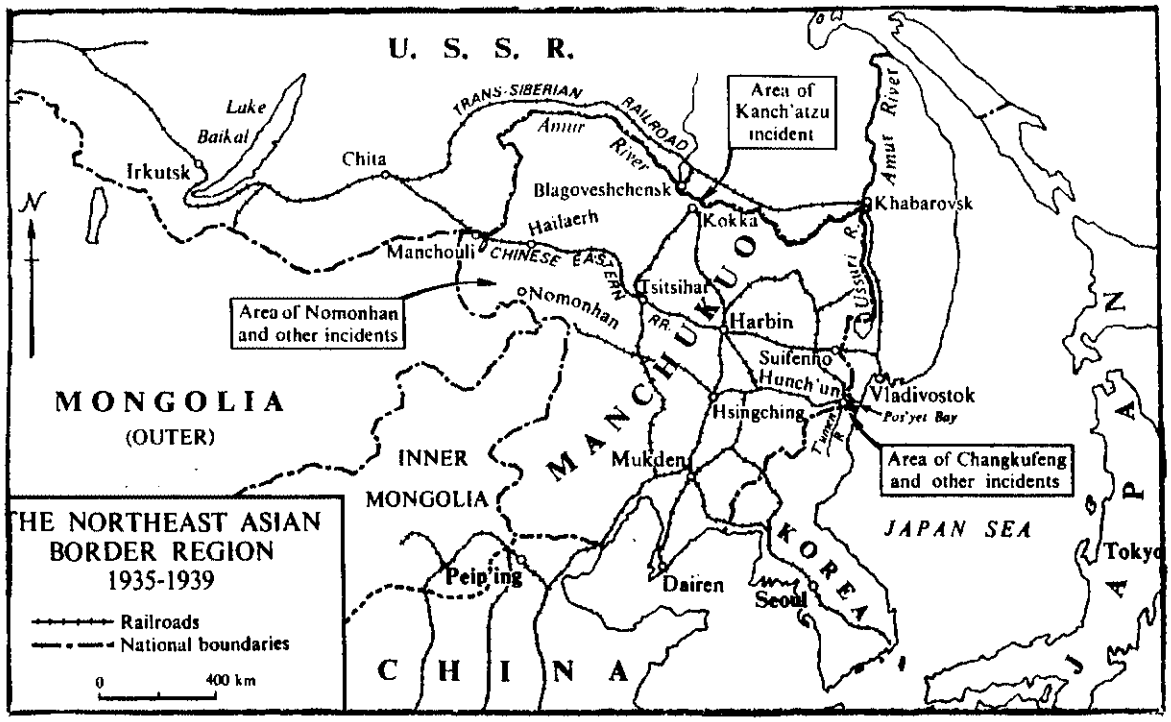
[22]Maurice Hindus, Russia and Japan (New York: Doubleday Doran, 1942), 94.

[23]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 137-38.

Figure 3

The Northeast Asian Border Region, 1935-1939



Source: Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 135. The Amur River Incident is labelled as the "Kanch'atzu Incident" on this map along Manchukuo's northern border.

Meanwhile, diplomatic negotiations were taking place which would quell the fighting temporarily. The Japanese ambassador to the U.S.S.R., Mamoru Shigemitsu, and Foreign Commissar Maxim Litvinov began talks in Moscow on 28 June.[24] Initially, both sides claimed ownership of the islands in question. Although the Japanese counterattack irritated the

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[24]As a convenience to the reader, Japanese proper names appear according to the English language usage, i.e., given name before family name unless otherwise dictated by an author's previous work. Macrons are also not used for Japanese names within the text.

Soviet delegation, Litvinov agreed on 2 July to withdraw all Soviet forces. The Soviet withdrawal was accomplished within two days of the agreement. Likewise, the Kwantung Army units were ordered back to their original positions.[25] Diplomacy had averted the immediate possibility of further escalation between the two nations.

The political significance and consequences of the Amur River Incident were threefold. First, regardless of actual ownership of the disputed islands, the Soviets voluntarily made all of the concessions. This was because the Soviets probably had initiated the incident for the reason of distracting Japanese attention away from China. With this accomplished, the Soviets no longer needed to continue the fight. Thus, Litvinov was willing to settle the matter despite the Japanese counter-attack. Regardless of Soviet motives, the island empire believed it had won another victory over its communist neighbor to the north. Thus, the Japanese hailed the news of the settlement as a diplomatic victory for Japan.[26] Secondly, the armed clash provided an opportunity for Japan to test Soviet strength as the Japanese began hostilities with China. Japan concluded that the Soviet withdrawl proved the superiority of Japanese troops. These ramifications led the Kwantung Army in

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[25]Ibid., 138-39.

[26]Max Beloff, The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929-1941, vol. 2, 1936-1941 (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 180n.

particular to presume that the Soviet Union maintained a conciliatory policy toward Japan and was ill-prepared for a war between the two nations. Therefore, Japan felt free to expand its fight against China without fear of a Soviet counter-offensive into Manchukuo. Finally, the Kwantung Army's counterattack in disregard of Tokyo's nonenlargement order caused a sense of humiliation to exist between the army and Tokyo. This "loss of face," and the army's desire to regain its lost prestige, were factors contributing to the escalation of fighting along the Manchukuo border.[27]

The Changkufeng Incident in the following year, July 1938, represented another test of Soviet and Japanese resolve. Changkufeng originated as a boundary dispute where Manchukuo and the Soviet Union joined Korea (see Figure 4). The incident commenced on 11 July 1938 as Soviet troops occupied the strategic point atop Changkufeng mountain which dominated much of northern Korea. The Japanese contended that this was a violation of Manchukuoan territory and immediately demanded that the Soviet troops withdraw, threatening retaliation if the Soviets failed to comply.[28] Joseph Grew estimated that

> . . . this particular incident seems to have been more serious than usual and reminded us of the trouble over the islands in the Amur River last year, when the

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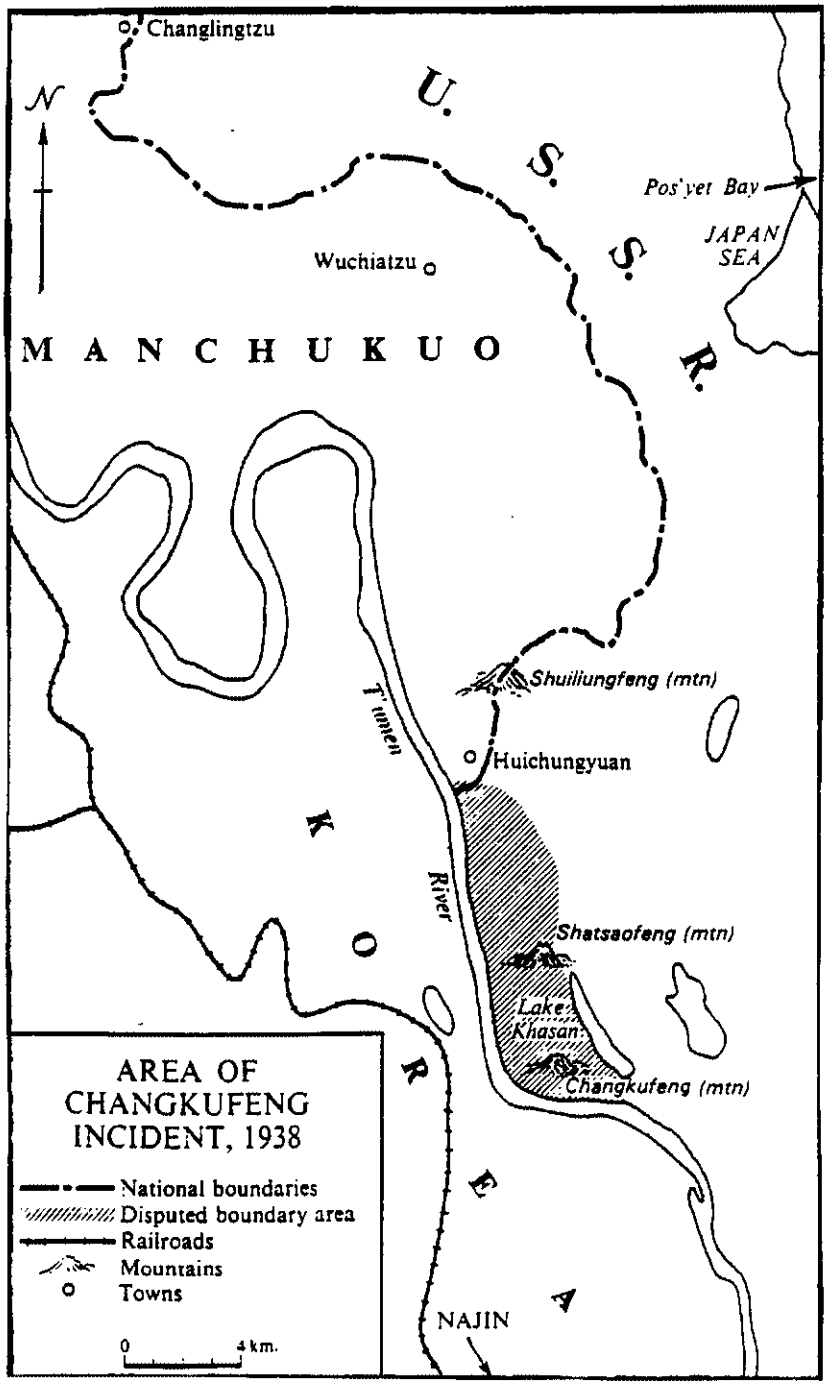
[27]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 140.

[28]Mamoru Shigemitsu, Japan and Her Destiny: My Struggle for Peace, ed. F. S. G. Piggott, trans. Oswald White (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 158-59.

Figure 4

Area of Changkufeng Incident, 1938



Source: Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 143.

> Japanese appeared to be trying out the Soviet strength. In the present case it may be that the Russians were testing the Japanese strength and determination, or they may have staged the incident in order to draw Japanese troops away from the drive on Hankow with a view to co-operating with the Chinese.[29]

Despite Tokyo's best efforts at nonenlargement, firing began on 29 July when the Soviets occupied even more positions two kilometers north of Chankufeng.[30] Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo issued another order of nonenlargement beyond the present situation. In spite of the repeated order, the Japanese army executed another attack on 31 July which successfully expelled the Soviet forces from both locales.

However, the Soviet Union refused to let the matter end. The Soviets utilized aircraft, tanks, and artillery to recover the lost ground.[31] The fighting soon became general and continued until 11 August 1938 when another cease-fire agreement was negotiated in Moscow between Shigemitsu and Litvinov.[32] By this time, the Japanese had suffered heavy casualties. Outnumbered almost two to one, Japanese losses climbed to between 1,000 and 3,100 killed and wounded while Soviet casualties reached nearly 900.[33]

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[29]Grew, Ten Years in Japan, 251.

[30]Alvin D. Coox, The Anatomy of a Small War: The Soviet-Japanese Struggle for Changkufeng/Khasan, 1938 (London: Greenwood Press, 1977), 83-88.

[31]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 146-49.

[32]Robert J. C. Butow, Togo and the Coming of the War (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 126.

[33]Beloff, Foreign Policy, vol. 2, 1936-1941, 193n.

Although Changkufeng began and ended under comparable circumstances to the Amur River Incident as Grew suggested, the results were significantly different. First, as Japan's army took heavy casualties and lost the upper hand, Japanese diplomacy obtained a cease-fire agreement on terms better than Japan deserved. This was due largely to the fact that the Soviets decided not to follow up on its advantage. The exact reasons remained unclear, but Grew made the assessment that the Soviets had obtained their goal by redirecting desperately needed Japanese troops from Hankow north into Manchukuo.[34] Thus, the Soviets accepted Shigemitsu's proposal that the Japanese forces withdraw from Changkufeng in exchange for the cease-fire. As for Japan, Shigemitsu conceded ground in order to end the fighting. Even so, Japan interpreted the Soviet move as additional proof that the Soviet Union had no desire to intervene in the Sino-Japanese crisis.[35] Next, the Japanese army suffered heavily because it failed to recognize the full potential of the modern Soviet armed forces. The Soviet superiority in mechanized weapons was further exploited due to the fact that vast numbers of Japanese troops were then committed to the Hankow campaign in China.[36] Finally, the subordinate officers on the Asian continent continued to disregard the

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[34]Grew, Ten Years in Japan, 251.

[35]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 154.

[36]Coox, Anatomy of a Small War, 358-60.

Japanese high command in Tokyo. As in the Amur River Incident, the disobedience of orders at Changkufeng was tolerated without censure. This trend allowed the young army officers to gain further control of Japan's foreign policy. In other words, by disregarding the consequences of their actions, the expansionists within the army could initiate conflicts the Japanese government was ill-prepared to support. Nomonhan would prove to be another example of this unfortunate tendency.[37]

Ironically, the most severe border clash, Nomonhan, served to quell further conflicts more so than any temporary diplomatic agreement. The Nomonhan Incident, May-September 1939, originated as a dispute along the Manchukuo-Outer Mongolia border (see Figure 5). Outer Mongolian armed forces crossed into Manchukuo and engaged the Manchukuoan garrison near Nomonhan. The conflict escalated on 13 May and 28 May as both Japan and the Soviet Union dispatched reinforcements of their own to Nomonhan. Up to this point, the Kwantung Army had followed its policy established in April 1939 of striking back if attacked, but nonescalation beyond the locality in dispute, and then finding a quick solution.[38]

However, the second phase of combat elevated the

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[37]Stephen S. Large, Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan: A Political Biography (London: Routledge, 1992), 92-93.

[38]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 162.

Figure 5

Area of Nomonhan Incident, 1939

Source: Alvin D. Coox, Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939, vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 144.

fighting at Nomonhan to the strategic scale. Beginning on 18 June, Soviet heavy bombers conducted a series of air strikes against key strategic targets within Manchukuo. The Kwantung Army proposed to conduct reprisal air raids of its own, but Tokyo forbade the operations. Nevertheless, the Kwantung Army allowed the bombing to proceed on 27 June.[39] These air raids were followed by a massive Japanese ground assault on 2 July. Once again, the independent nature of the Kwantung Army hindered any attempt by Tokyo to control the situation. Fierce fighting continued until September 1939, by which time the Kwantung Army obviously had been defeated soundly. Japanese losses exceeded 17,000, while Soviet losses were approximately 9,000.[40]

In addition to the mounting losses of military personnel accumulated by both sides, outside considerations greatly influenced the cessation of hostilities at Nomonhan. For the Soviet Union, the truce signed on 16 September 1939 freed the Soviet army in Europe to conduct its occupation of Poland without fear of a full scale war developing at its back door. Similarly, the Japanese realized that diplomacy might achieve results which a clash of arms could not, namely, a settlement of Soviet-Japanese disputes.

The fierceness of the Nomonhan fighting caused several significant results. First, the insubordination by the

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[39]Coox, Nomonhan, vol. 1, 271-73.

[40]Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 175.

Kwantung Army resulted in the removal of several key personnel, including the commander of the Kwantung Army, Kenkichi Ueda; the Kwantung Army chief of staff, Resuke Isogai; and other top-level staff members. The censure, though quick and deliberate, failed to quell the trend especially among the Kwantung Army for disobeying orders in the vain hope that the ends would justify the means.[41] Secondly, the Japanese army finally realized that its dependence upon hand-to-hand combat was outdated. Priority was then given to updating the tactics and increasing the number of tanks and artillery in the army, too late for the thousands lost in the Nomonhan fighting.[42] Another result was that the diplomatic channels again gained an end to the conflict. Unlike the Amur River and Changkufeng Incidents, however, Japan found itself making the concessions in order to resolve the Nomonhan Incident.[43] Finally, the bitter fighting surrounding Nomonhan resulted in a relatively quiet period along the Manchukuo frontier. Neither the Japanese, who now realized the full potential of the Soviet Union, nor the Soviets, who had to worry about the rising crisis in Europe, desired another battle on the strategic scale.

With the close of the fighting at Nomonhan, the undeclared Soviet-Japanese war of the late 1930s effectively

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[41]Ibid., 176.

[42]Coox, Nomonhan, vol. 2, 1010-13.

[43]Ibid., 904-6.

ended. A relatively peaceful period soon followed. This period developed directly as a result of the Japanese defeat at Nomonhan. Following the battle, many Japanese officials felt a profound sense of failure, which forced Japan to realize the necessity for improved Soviet-Japanese relations. Thus, Japan and the Soviet Union developed comparatively cordial relations. Negotiations took place in regard to the border demarcation along the Manchukuo frontier, Japanese fishery rights in Soviet waters, and economic trade agreements. Later, these amicable relations between Japan and the U.S.S.R. helped to facilitate the conclusion of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, initialled in Moscow by Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka and Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav M. Molotov in April 1941. This treaty constituted an increasingly uneasy peace between the two nations until August 1945, nearly six years after the last shots were fired at Nomonhan.

CHAPTER III

THREE IMPORTANT AGREEMENTS

Three important treaties were concluded within three years of each other which greatly influenced the nature of future Soviet-Japanese relations. The Soviet-German Non-aggression Pact, 1939, offered the U.S.S.R. an opportunity to take advantage of the situation in Europe for its own national gains. Likewise, the treaty influenced the Japanese, who were bewildered by the apparent shift in the foreign policy of Germany. Japan had believed that the Anti-Comintern Pact linked the Japanese and Germans together as ideological partners aimed against the Soviets. The non-aggression pact seemed to contradict this belief. Nevertheless, Japan became reconciled with Germany. In the following year, 1940, Japan, Germany, and Italy concluded the Tripartite Pact; thus, the Axis bloc was consummated. Japan, convinced by German propaganda, held out hopes that the Soviet Union would collaborate with the Tripartite Pact.[1] However, the deterioration of German-Soviet cooperation in Europe removed all hope of the U.S.S.R. becoming the fourth Axis power.

Finally, Japan and the Soviet Union finalized the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, 1941, which established

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[1]Toshikazu Kase, Journey to the Missouri, edited by David Nelson Rowe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 41.

both nations' foreign policy toward each other throughout World War II. For Japan, the neutrality pact represented a concerted effort to carry out its southern expansion policy. The Soviet defeat of Germany's invasion of the U.S.S.R. cemented this policy. Additionally, the pact announced Soviet determination to defeat Germany before any of its military attention could be focused on Japan. Thus, not until after the surrender of Berlin did the Soviet Union declare war upon Japan, August 1945, removing the last vestiges of hope for the Japanese to negotiate an end to the war. In September 1945, Japan surrendered unconditionally.

Soviet-Japanese relations deteriorated steadily in the opening months of 1939. The undeclared border war had peaked as the fighting around Nomonhan continued into a fourth month. Casualties incurred by both armies increased alarmingly as neither side showed signs of backing down. As no solution appeared to be forthcoming, many Japanese at least believed that the battle at Nomonhan had the potential of becoming a fully declared war.[2] Had this occurred, World War II would have been remembered for beginning in eastern Asia, not in Europe. Ironically, events in Europe helped to do what neither Japan nor the U.S.S.R. seemed able to do, ease the tension in Soviet-Japanese relations.

One of the chief events to aid in the relaxation of

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[2]Coox, Nomonhan, vol. 2, 854-55; and Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," 170.

Soviet-Japanese friction was the conclusion of the Soviet-German Nonaggression Pact on 23 August 1939. The reason why the pact softened relations between the Soviet Union and Japan are evident in the Soviet motives for negotiating the treaty and the Japanese reaction. Soviet justification for entering into an agreement with its traditional enemy was rooted in the Soviet anti-imperialist campaign of the 1930s. The Soviet Union had been disturbed greatly by the Anglo-French appeasement of Nazi Germany in regards to the Munich Crisis, 1938. Specifically, Moscow believed that the Soviet Union should also have been consulted regarding a solution to the crisis. England and France failed to ask for Soviet opinion. During the Yalta Conference, 1945, Joseph Stalin remarked that his country would have never joined in any agreement with Germany had Britain and France not failed to consult the Soviet Union regarding Munich.[3]

Another factor included the secret agreement arranged between Germany and the Soviet Union at the time of the pact. This secret protocol outlined the partition of Poland between the two signatories as the German invasion of Poland neared. The Soviet Union saw the Anglo-French appeasement policy as a batrayal. Thus, the Soviet-German negotiations in 1939 provided the Soviets an opportunity to gain a buffer zone against possible German invasion. This buffer zone included Polish territory. In other words, as payment for

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[3]Beloff, Foreign Policy, vol. 2, 1936-1941, 165n.

not consulting Moscow over Munich, the U.S.S.R. arranged to seize territory on its western border.[4]

Finally, the fighting at Nomonhan encouraged a settlement with Germany in Europe. At the time, the Nomonhan incident continued to escalate and neither nation could foresee an end to the fighting. As far as the Soviet Union could tell, Nomonhan may have been the first step to a full scale war with Japan. The Soviet-German Nonaggression Pact secured the European front temporarily. Moreover, the new treaty influenced Soviet-Japanese relations. As a result of the new situation in Europe following the conclusion of the pact, the Hiranuma cabinet collapsed.[5] Shortly thereafter, the fighting at Nomonhan ended and a period of relative calm developed in post-Nomonhan Soviet-Japanese relations. Thus, the Soviet-German Nonaggression Pact of 1939 served Soviet foreign policy on both fronts, Europe and Asia.

Japanese reaction to the conclusion of the Soviet-German Nonaggression Pact also influenced future Soviet-Japanese relations. There was little doubt that news of the new treaty alarmed the Japanese. A Japanese diplomat with close friendships to many top German officials, Ambassador Hiroshi Oshima in Berlin, exploded at German Foreign

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[4]Grigory Deborin, Secrets of the Second World War (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 31, 35-36.

[5]Ibid., 37.

Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop when the latter informed Oshima of the German decision to conclude the pact.[6] Ever since signing the Anti-Comintern Pact, Japan had viewed Germany as an ideological ally against communism. The conclusion of the Soviet-German Nonaggression Pact, however, disillusioned Japan's view of Germany. In fact, the pro-Nazi elements within the Japanese military and government lost credibility as a result.

The extent to which the pro-German faction lost prestige in Japan was evidenced by the repositioning of key personnel within the Japanese government. The preeminent example of this dissatisfaction was the recall of Oshima as ambassador to Germany in September 1939.[7] Oshima had been a staunch supporter of closer ties with Germany.

The changing situation in Japan caused turmoil in Japan's foreign policy. As support of Germany ebbed, Japanese foreign policy aimed at improving relations with England, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Evidence of this trend was the appointment of Noboyuki Abe as premier. The Abe cabinet succeeded that of Kiichiro Hiranuma, which had resigned due to the new situation in

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[6]Chihiro Hosoya, "The Tripartite Pact, 1939-1940," in Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the U.S.S.R., 1935-1940, ed. James William Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 191.

[7]Carl Boyd, Hitler's Japanese Confidant: General Oshima Hiroshi and Magic Intelligence, 1941-1945 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 3.

Europe. Before resigning, Premier Hiranuma transmitted a statement to Germany of Japan's resentment. The Abe government continued the policy of distancing Japan from Germany and adopting a more pro-Anglo-American foreign policy. This was demonsrated by the appointment of Kichisaburo Nomura as Abe's foreign minister. Nomura, known in Japan as pro-American, set to work immediately to improve Japanese-American relations.

Meanwhile, the new foreign minister separated Japan temporarily from Germany. Although he did not denounce the Anti-Comintern Pact, Nomura continued the policy stated by the outgoing Hiranuma cabinet and called off all negotiations aimed at strengthening the Anti-Comintern Pact. Thus, the news of the Soviet-German treaty took Japan unawares and the island empire underwent drastic internal changes as a result. Realignment of Japanese foreign policy also resulted.[8] As one Japanese diplomat wrote in his post-war memoirs, the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact blatantly announced the fact that

> Germany and Japan thought on different lines and that their aims and interests did not agree well together. Just as the Anti-Comintern Pact had been reduced to blank paper, so Japan's commitments had been liquidated. Japan had been given back her liberty so that she could start again.[9]

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[8]Yale Candee Maxon, Control of Japanese Foreign Policy: A Study of Civil-Military Rivalry, 1930-1945 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 139-40.

[9]Shigemitsu, Japan and Her Destiny, 177.

However, these conditions prevailed in Japan for only four months in late 1939.

As 1940 dawned, the pro-Anglo-American faction within the Japanese government lost all ground gained upon the pro-German element. Domestic problems and increased German propaganda as a result of Nazi military victories led many Japanese officials back into the pro-Axis fold. Moreover, by early-January, the negotiations between Foreign Minister Nomura and Joseph Grew had failed.[10] Thus, hopes of improving upon Japanese-American relations all but vanished. This fact coinciding with even further domestic problems, such as the shortage of both food and electricity, forced the fall of the Abe cabinet in that same month.[11] Mitsumasa Yonai succeeded Abe as premier. Reluctantly, Yonai watched as Japan once again steered a course back in the direction of Germany and the Axis coalition.

The Yonai premiership represented another attempt by the pro-Anglo-American element to maintain control over Japan's foreign policy. However, international events soon provided fuel to the pro-German cause, making that faction too strong for Yonai to resist. For separate reasons, the position of both England and the United States in Japan weakened in early 1940. The Royal Navy's boarding of the Japanese vessel Asama-maru on 21 January aroused Japanese

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[10]Hosoya, "The Tripartite Pact," 200.

[11]Ibid.

public opinion against Britain. Likewise, the U.S. policy of economic sanctions against Japan was not received well by the Japanese. This deterioration of Anglo-American sentiment within Japan encouraged the pro-German faction to regain public favor. Although the Yonai cabinet originated as a pro-Anglo-American cabinet, domestic problems carried over from the Abe cabinet as well as international events provided the stimuli for the recovery of pro-Axis fervor.[12]

During the Yonai administration, the military clique, or gumbatsu, regained all power lost as a result of the Soviet-German Nonaggression Pact. As the German war machine occupied Poland, Denmark, Norway, and the Low Countries, and even forced France to submit by June, the idea of Japan accomplishing the same in Asia stirred many patriotic souls. Japan believed that a "New Order in East Asia" should be established under Japanese control. Under this euphemistic phrase, the Japanese envisioned commanding Machukuo, Inner Mongolia, and northern China. As Ambassador Joseph Grew noted in August 1940, "The German military machine and system and their brilliant successes have gone to the Japanese head like strong wine."[13] Therefore, Germany regained all lost credibility and once again rose to prominence in the minds of many Japanese officials. As a result, the Japanese military and pro-Axis faction regained

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[12]Ibid., 201-4.

[13]Grew, Ten Years in Japan, 325.

its lost credibility as well.[14]

The resurgence of the military in Japan pressured the Yonai administration into resignation. On 4 July 1940, over fifty pro-Axis Japanese were arrested for planning the assassination of Yonai and other high-ranking government officials. Furthermore, the army complained that Japan's foreign policy did not coincide with the military operations being conducted in Asia. Thus, the gumbatsu demanded a new cabinet in order to facilitate these military maneuvers.[15] Even more pressure originated from the military as the General Staff ordered Yonai's war minister, Shunroku Hata, to resign.[16] In this way, the army could refuse to suggest Hata's successor and force the Yonai cabinet to fall. Understandably, the Yonai cabinet could not operate successfully under the circumstances and resigned in mid-July 1940.

The succession of Prince Fumimaro Konoe, solidified Japan's foreign policy direction for the next five years.[17] One author commented that the appointment of Konoe represented a "period of almost complete eclipse of civil authority."[18] Shortly after Konoe formed his cabinet, on 27

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[14]Oka, Konoe, 91.

[15]Maxon, Japanese Foreign Policy, 143.

[16]Kase, Journey to the Missouri, 40.

[17]Konoe had two successive premierships, his second and third administrations from July 1940 to July 1941 and from July 1941 to October 1941.

[18]Maxon, Japanese Foreign Policy, 149.

July 1940, the new government adopted the goal of strengthening its relations with both Germany and Italy. This policy decision was carried out through the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact which guided Japanese foreign policy until September 1945.

The policy decision to improve German-Japanese relations brought an unusual character into the forefront, Foreign Minister Matsuoka. Matsuoka's "brink-of-war diplomacy" became notorious during this period in Japanese history, as he relished the opportunity to negotiate an alliance with Germany. The foreign minister was credited with stating that Japan ought to push forward with a positive foreign policy, "hand in hand with Germany," committing "double suicide" if necessary.[19] This style of thought pushed Matsuoka on 1 August 1940 into approaching Germany in order to open talks between the two nations.

However, the international situation in Europe altered the amount of importance Germany had once placed on reaching a stronger military alliance with Japan. By August 1940, Germany had taken most of western Europe and was fighting the Battle for Britain. Originally, Germany desired an alliance with Japan simply so the Japanese navy could occupy the attention of the British fleet in the Pacific while the German army realized its aims in the European theater.[20]

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[19]Hosoya, "The Tripartite Pact," 215.

[20]Ibid., 196-97, 224.

The successful blitzkrieg obviated this need. Thus, by the time Japan was willing to pursue talks, Germany had become convinced that there was no need to any further treaty.

A change of German opinion allowed the treaty talks to begin in late August. Germany's reasons for entering into the negotiations were threefold. First, German optimism at the prospect of an immediate British surrender had waned. Next, the chance of the United States entering the war had increased and posed a threat to Germany's war aims. Finally, Matsuoka had hinted that a rapprochement between Japan and the United States was possible. This Japanese attempt at convincing Germany to adjust its policy appeared to work as Germany dispatched a diplomat to Tokyo in early September.[21]

These negotiations culminated in the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact and greatly influenced future Japanese policy. The German-Japanese talks were initiated in Tokyo on 9 September 1940. Joachim von Ribbentrop, who was conducting discussions in Italy, dispatched "his trusted [m]inister," Heinrich Stahmer, to conduct the negotiations for Germany while Matsuoka continued to represent Japan.[22] One of the greatest barriers to the conclusion of an agreement was the strength of the proposed alliance. Germany desired a pact more likened to a mutual assistance treaty,

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[21]Ibid., 226-27.

[22]Shigemitsu, Japan and Her Destiny, 203.

but Japan desired a less binding accord. A second barrier to the conclusion of any agreement was the Japanese navy's opposition to a tripartite military pact.[23] However, both obstacles were overcome eventually and the Tripartite Pact was signed on 27 September 1940. This agreement remained the principle guiding factor to Japan's foreign policy until the capitulation in September 1945.

Several statements within the pact revealed the true nature of the treaty. The key portions of the new agreement were Article three and the secret protocol. Article three stated:

> Germany, Italy, and Japan agree to co-operate in their efforts on the aforesaid lines. They further undertake to assist one another with all political, economic, and military means when one of the three Contracting Parties is attacked by a power at present not involved in the European war or in the Sino-Japanese conflict.[24]

This statement was aimed primarily at the United States, but also at the Soviet Union which was not yet involved in the war against Germany. Matsuoka believed that the appearance of Japan's willingness to go to war would permanently deter United States entry into the Pacific War.[25] The Soviet question was solved as far as Japan was concerned within the secret protocol. Paragraph four of the secret protocol

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[23]Hosoya, "The Tripartite Pact," 236-39.

[24]Ibid., 298-99. Appendix 7 contains the material accompanying Hosoya's essay.

[25]Ibid., 240.

attached significance to improving relations among Germany, Japan, and Italy with the Soviet Union. Moreover, the pact established the aim to persuade the U.S.S.R. to cooperate with the Tripartite Pact.[26] Also in the secret protocol was a clause insisted upon by the Japanese in which each contracting nation withheld the right to decide whether or not to go to war. Here was Japan's fail-safe in case the Soviet Union entered into the European War against Germany. If this occurred, Japan retained the right to declare war or not, as it saw fit. This consideration would be done when necessary and would largely depend upon Japan's progress in creating the "New Order in East Asia" through its southern advance campaign. Even so, the new pact Pact linked the Axis powers formally into a mutual assistance alliance. As Matsuoka suggested, this coalition was a do or die endeavor for Japan and Germany. The gamble failed and both nations were forced to commit "double suicide" in 1945.

When Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka arrived in Moscow in March 1941, on the first leg of his European visit that would also take him onto Berlin and Rome, he found the European situation much different than the Tokyo government had imagined. Japan believed that the relatively amicable relations that prevailed at the time of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of August 1939 still existed. Many Japanese moreover, Matsuoka included, thought that the

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[26]Shigemitsu, Japan and Her Destiny, 203.

U.S.S.R. could be convinced to cooperate with the Tripartite Pact. Thus, Japan assumed that this visit to Europe offered an opportunity to strengthen Japanese relations with Germany and Italy while attempting to establish even closer ties between Japan and the Soviet Union. However, the foreign minister soon discovered that the state of German-Soviet relations had deteriorated to the point that Moscow would never join the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis.[27] Even so, there remained the occasion to improve upon Soviet-Japanese relations. In fact, the more war seemed likely between Germany and the Soviet Union, the more the Soviets desired an agreement with the Japanese.

Foreign Minister Matsuoka's trip through Europe was not the first attempt to finalize an accord between Japan and the Soviet Union. Prior to 1941, negotiations had occurred for several reasons. The outbreak of war in Europe among England, France, and Germany made it profitable for the Soviet Union to finalize an agreement with Japan. Concurrently, Japan desired an agreement with the Soviets as its war in China dragged on and Japanese-American relations degenerated.[28] The Japanese ambassador in Moscow, Shigenori Togo, recommended that Japan agree to a nonaggression pact advocated by the Soviets. However, Premier Mitsumasa Yonai

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[27]Ibid., 211, 214; and Yoshitake Oka, Konoe Fumimaro: A Political Biography, trans. Sumpei Okamoto and Patricia Murray (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1992), 137.

[28]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 2-3.

was reluctant to commit the Japanese Empire to such a treaty. Yonai believed that a nonaggression pact weakened Japan's superior position over the Soviet Union. As noted above, Prince Fumimaro Konoe succeeded Yonai as premier in July 1940. This change in government ushered in a new period in Japanese foreign policy.

A critical new era unfolded as the Konoe cabinet replaced that of Yonai. Yonai had been a stabilizing factor in Japanese international diplomacy. During his tenure as premier, Yonai had been able to check the expansion of the pro-Axis army faction in the Japanese government. Joseph Grew paraphrased a conversation he had had with Yonai in which the Japanese premier stated:

> "Japanese policy has been decided. The element in Japan which desires Fascism for Japan and the consequent linking up with Germany and Italy had been 'suppressed'." Japan, [Yonai] said, while co-operating for the maintenance of friendly relations with both the democracies and the authoritarian states, must stand apart from either group, her own ideology being different from both of them.[29]

Eventually, the army pressured for the resignation of War Minister Shunroku Hata which in turn forced the collapse of the Yonai cabinet. Obviously, the element which desired an alignment with Germany and Italy was not as suppressed as Yonai believed. This led to the succession of Konoe in July 1940. The new premier was described by one author as "a

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[29]Grew, Ten Years in Japan, 281.

sort of reluctant puppet."[30] Konoe's public popularity made him an attractive choice to the army who needed an influential, yet, "cooperative" premier. The Konoe appointment fulfilled the army's wishes. Furthermore, the militarists rejoiced at Konoe's choice of Matsuoka as foreign minister. Matsuoka favored a pro-Nazi policy similar to the rising army clique. He had a reputation for strong foreign policy and a natural ambition for power once in the national spotlight. Thus, the change in cabinet precipitated a shift in the balance of power within the Japanese government to favor the pro-fascist elements. This resulted in a radical change in Japan's role in international diplomacy as demonstrated by the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact.

In the place of a nonaggression agreement, Tokyo attempted to negotiate a neutrality pact, but the Soviets stubbornly resisted. Foreign Minister Yonai had instructed Ambassador Togo to negotiate a neutrality pact. Carrying out these directions, on 2 July 1940 Togo introduced the conclusion of a five-year neutrality pact to Vyacheslav Molotov, Soviet commissar of foreign affairs.[31] Molotov expressed the Soviet feeling that a neutrality pact alone benefited Japan. He continued that if Japan would not commit itself to a nonaggression pact, then Japan must

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[30]Maxon, Japanese Foreign Policy, 149.

[31]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 4.

compensate the Soviet Union for signing a neutrality pact.[32] Molotov outlined the details of this compensation in the Soviet counter proposal which was not long in coming.

The U.S.S.R., intent upon gaining compensation for agreeing to a neutrality pact, continued to press the issue in the following month. On 14 August, Molotov provided Togo with a written proposal for a Soviet-Japanese neutrality pact. Moscow's offer differed little, on the basic points, from the original pact proposed by Togo in July. However, as compensation for the neutrality pact, the Soviet Union demanded the liquidation of the Japanese oil and coal concessions on North Sakhalin, which the Japanese had acquired in December, 1925. The Soviets now offered to pay for these concessions as well as supply Japan 100,000 tons of North Sakhalin oil over a period of five years. Molotov stated that this was more than fair payment for Japanese abandonment of North Sakhalin.[33] The collapse of the Yonai cabinet forced the Soviet proposal to be left unanswered.

Several obstacles hindered Soviet-Japanese talks. The Soviets were concerned that any Soviet-Japanese agreement

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[32]Ibid., 4-5.

[33]U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Collection of Japanese Diplomatic Messages, 12 July 1938-21 January 1942," SRH-018, in Top Secret Studies on U.S. Communications Intelligence during World War II, pt. 1, The Pacific Theater (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1989, microfilm), p. 12, reel 5, fr. 0774.

would hinder Soviet relations with other outside powers. Specifically, Moscow wanted to maintain good relations with China and the United States. The Soviets feared that the international community, China in particular, would perceive any agreement as facilitating Japanese expansion into Asia. The Soviets, however, were not so committed to their Chinese neighbors that they would not bargain for a profit.[34] Thus, Moscow demanded Japan's liquidation of North Sakhalin. Another reason behind Soviet motives was the fact that Moscow believed that signing an agreement secured the Soviet eastern borders with Manchukuo and Korea from Japanese attack. This idea seemed most appealing to the Soviets who believed that the war in Europe would soon engulf their citizens. Hence, the Soviets desired a nonaggression treaty over a neutrality pact. When this appeared unlikely, the Soviets demanded payment for a lesser agreement. It was apparent that the Soviet Union could be bought.

Japan slowed the negotiations for its own reasons. The incidents at Chankufeng and at Nomonhan in particular, forced Japan to realize that it could not fight two wars, against China and the U.S.S.R., at the same time. Therefore, Japan desired an agreement which would end these conflicts. Even so, Japan maintained a sense of superiority. Firm in its self-righteous attitude, Tokyo ordered Ambassador Togo to negotiate a neutrality pact only.

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[34]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 4-5.

A neutrality pact would free Japan from the Soviet-Japanese border war, allowing the army to prosecute the war in China more efficiently.[35] But, no amount of Soviet diplomacy could convince Japan to liquidate the North Sakhalin concessions immediately. With Japan unwilling to give up the concessions and the Soviet Union reluctant to sign any treaty without compensation, Soviet-Japanese negotiations appeared deadlocked.

Meanwhile, an important meeting took place in Tokyo that would soon revitalize the stalled negotiations. Matsuoka held a liaison conference on 3 February 1941 in order to discuss Japanese foreign policy and the objectives of his forthcoming European visit. These goals included the gaining of a pledge from the Soviets of continued friendly relations and of mutual territorial respect. Also proposed was an attempt to purchase North Sakhalin Island. If the sale proved impossible, Matsuoka was instructed to negotiate for 1.5 million tons of oil as compensation for liquidating the oil and coal concessions on the island. However, the military still retained reservations about the foreign minister.[36] The army and naval hierarchy worried that Matsuoka, with his "brink-of-war" diplomacy, would enter

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[35]Victor Issraeljan and Leonid Kutakov, Diplomacy of Aggression: Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis, Its Rise and Fall, trans. David Skvirsky (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 149.

[36]Shigemitsu, Japan and Her Destiny, 211.

Japan into a military agreement that the nation could not fulfill. Therefore, the supreme command decided at the liaison conference that Matsuoka should be attended on his trip by attaches representing both the army and the navy. These attendants were to ensure that the foreign minister did not make any military commitments that Japan was ill-prepared to execute.[37] Even with this precaution in place, several Japanese government officials believed that Matsuoka overextended the Japanese Empire by concluding the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, signed on 13 April 1941.

Matsuoka soon learned the true pitiful state of German-Soviet relations. In fact, Matsuoka learned while in Berlin that a German attack on the U.S.S.R. was a possibility.[38] However, whether the foreign minister truly realized the severity of the situation remained a mystery. What is known is that when Matsuoka arrived in Moscow on 7 April 1941, on the return trip from Rome and Berlin to Tokyo, he held a better grasp of the German-Soviet situation than he had had earlier when he departed Japan in March.

The next two days of negotiations disheartened the Japanese envoy to the point where a treaty of any kind seemed unlikely. During these two days, 7-8 April 1941, Matsuoka made two separate attempts at a pact. In his first meeting with Molotov, Matsuoka endeavored to exact a

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[37]Ibid.; and Butow, Tojo, 206.

[38]Boyd, Hitler's Japanese Confidant, 19.

nonaggression pact which included the sale of North Sakhalin to Japan. The Soviets refused this proposal. Failing to conclude a nonaggression pact under his own terms, Matsuoka then made an effort to conclude a neutrality pact similar to the Soviet proposed draft of November 1940. However, this proposal included one important modification. Matsuoka withdrew the protocol calling for the liquidation of the North Sakhalin oil and coal concessions, which remained a constant problem throughout the past months of negotiations. Molotov found this unacceptable as well.[39] Two days of talks had elicited nothing but Soviet refusals. Thus, Matsuoka had all but given up hope of concluding a meaningful pact and had resigned himself to negotiating trade and fishery agreements when a last-minute request to meet with Joseph Stalin was granted on 12 April.[40]

The short discussion between Matsuoka and Stalin greatly influenced Soviet-Japanese relations for the next four years. During this conference on 12 April 1941, Stalin agreed to Matsuoka's proposal of 11 April, to handle separate issues in separate communiques. So, by accepting Matsuoka's final request, the Soviets removed the last obstacle between the two nations and an agreement. Thus, Foreign Minister Matsuoka, Japanese Ambassador Yoshitsugu Tatekawa, and Foreign Commissar Molotov, signed the Soviet-

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[39]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 14-15.

[40]Ibid., 15.

Japanese Neutrality Pact on 13 April 1941.[41] Matsuoka later credited Nazi aggression partially for his success in concluding the agreement.[42] Even so, the neutrality agreement alleviated the pressures upon the Japanese military and therefore aided in the decision of a southern advance policy.[43]

The details of the treaty were significant to Soviet-Japanese relations over the next four years. The agreement, which went into effect upon the exchange of ratifications in Tokyo on 25 April, was to last five years. The pact guaranteed peaceful relations as well as mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity. If either nation became the target of hostilities by a third power, the other promised to remain neutral during the conflict. Finally, the pact was extended automatically another five years provided that neither party gave notice of cancellation one year before the expiration of the first term.[44] In 1945, the Soviet Union abrogated the agreement and then actively joined the Allied cause in the Pacific War.

Japan and the Soviet Union concluded several other

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[41]Tatekawa had been appointed by Matsuoka to succeed Togo as ambassador to the Soviet Union.

[42]Kase, Journey to the Missouri, 158.

[43]Ibid., 47.

[44]Department of State, "Soviet Denunciation of Pact with Japan," Department of State Bulletin 12 (January-June 1945): 812.

arrangements that same day that also played important roles in future relations. As agreed upon during the 12 April conference, a joint declaration was signed that guaranteed the territorial integrity and inviolability of both Manchukuo and Outer Mongolia. This measure represented de facto international recognition of Manchukuo by the Soviets, an issue of primary concern to the Japanese. In addition, semi-official letters were exchanged in which Matsuoka declared that the fishery situation would soon be settled. More importantly, however, the foreign minister promised that the oil and coal concessions on North Sakhalin would be solved "in a few months."[45] This reference to a time frame for the liquidation of the concessions later would become the object of much diplomatic controversy.

The Soviet Union regarded the new agreement as a triumph of Soviet diplomacy. First, respecting the military potential of the Japanese, the neutrality pact reduced the chances of a dreaded two-front war. This was especially timely since the United States had already warned Stalin about Germany's true intentions to invade the U.S.S.R.[46] Secondly, the separate protocol stating Japanese intentions to liquidate the North Sakhalin concessions provided the Soviets diplomatic leverage for the future.

The importance of the neutrality pact to the Soviet

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[45]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 16-17.

[46]Shigemitsu, Japan and Her Destiny, 216-17.

Union was demonstrated by Stalin's actions following the conclusion of negotiations. A banquet to commemorate the pact offered Stalin the opportunity to tell Matsuoka, "You are an Asiatic. So am I. We're all Asiatics."[47] This show of brotherhood was reinforced when Stalin appeared on the train platform to see Matsuoka off on the foreign minister's return trip to Japan. Toshikazu Kase, a Japanese diplomat present at the occasion, wrote:

> In those days Stalin never took the trouble to see off foreign guests. Therefore when the dictator appeared on the platform with us everybody rubbed their eyes . . . . Stalin warmly embraced Matsuoka and even allowed photographs to be taken of the scene. In fact, he kissed rather promiscuously . . . . Clearly the neutrality pact was as much a gift of providence for the Soviet Union as it was for Japan.[48]

The value of the neutrality pact to the Soviets was immeasurable.

As for Japan, the news of the neutrality pact received mixed reviews. Matsuoka for one rejoiced in what he termed his "lightning diplomacy." The foreign minister believed that the pact would help keep the Soviet Union and the United States in separate camps. Premier Konoe also welcomed the conclusion of the neutrality pact, but for different reasons. Konoe hoped the agreement could facilitate an amelioration between Japan and the United

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[47]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 19.

[48]Kase, Journey to the Missouri, 159.

States.[49] The Emperor also personally sanctioned the agreement in order to end the constant border clashes along the Manchukuo-Soviet and the Manchukuo-Mongolian borders. The Japanese Privy Council, however, did not share in the enthusiasm. Neither did the military supreme command which felt Matsuoka had overstepped his power and entered into an alliance that Japan had no interest in maintaining. Nevertheless, the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact opened the way for Japan to advance upon a positive southern policy which sparked the Pacific War.

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[49]Oka, Konoe, 117-118.

CHAPTER IV

MAINTAINING AN UNEASY PEACE, 1941-1944

The events that followed the conclusion of the five-year neutrality pact altered the basis of Soviet-Japanese relations. Two months had not passed since ratification of the new agreement when Germany invaded the Soviet Union on 22 July 1941. Moreover, on 7 December 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, thus bringing the United States fully into World War II. Therefore, eight months after Japan and the Soviet Union signed the neutrality pact, the two nations were at war with the other's allies. This odd arrangement naturally affected Soviet-Japanese relations. When the fortunes of war favored the Axis camp, as it seemed to do during 1941 and early 1942, Japan developed a stubbornly aggressive foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. However, when the strategic scale eventually tipped in favor of the Allies, the Soviets replaced the Japanese as the uncompromising negotiators in Soviet-Japanese relations.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Japanese utilized the initial successes of the German offensive to its own advantage.[1] To this end, Japan delayed the return of the North Sakhalin oil and coal

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[1]Boyd, Hitler's Japanese Confidant, 19-21. Germany gave every indication to both Matsuoka and Oshima in 1941

concessions to the Soviet Union. It should be recalled that Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka had promised to liquidate Japan's North Sakhalin concessions within several months of the conclusion of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact.[2] However, upon Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, Japan postponed fulfilling the promise until the fate of the Soviet Union had been decided. Although the Soviet Union interfered in the operation of the oil and coal concessions in order to put pressure upon Japan, the Japanese continued its policy of procrastination.[3] The Soviets resolved themselves not to push the issue because at that point the Soviet Union did not want to provoke a Japanese attack.

As the German-Soviet front stabilized, the Soviets resumed their demands for the liquidation of the oil and coal concessions upon the elusive Japanese. On 6 April 1942, Soviet Foreign Commissar Molotov engaged in an hour and a half discussion with the new Japanese ambassador Naotake Sato, who had presented his credentials on 5 April. Sato was a sincere diplomat who favored friendly Soviet-Japanese relations and who believed that the attack on Pearl

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that a Soviet-German war was inevitable. At least in the case of the ambassador, this news was indeed reported to Japanese officials in Tokyo.

[2]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 81. On 31 May 1941, Matsuoka further informed the Soviets that the concessions would be returned within six months from the date of his original promise, which had been made on 13 April 1941.

[3]Ibid., 78-79, 81.

Harbor was a regrettable error in judgement. During the meeting, Molotov argued that if two promises were made at the same time and one was not fulfilled, then the question arose as to the strength of the second promise. Sato replied that Japan needed to reexamine the concession agreement due to the changes in the situation since the original promise had been made.[4] Unsatisfied with the Japanese position, Molotov again met with Sato on 14 April 1942 and queried as to when Japan planned to return the concessions. In his report to Tokyo following the interview, Sato stated his reply to Molotov:

> I gave the changes in circumstances during the last year as an excuse for our not having carried out our end, and did not give [the Soviets] any satisfaction on the subject; and further made it clear that so far as Japan was concerned, so long as the present situation was unchanged, we would probably not be able to change our present view regarding the concessions.[5]

Sato further reported that Molotov sighed and said that if the above statement was Japan's position, then the concession question would have to be settled at a later date.[6] Even after the Soviets had contained the German

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[4]U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Magic Summary, April 21, 1942," SRS-0578, in Intercepted Japanese Messages: Operation Magic, 1938-1945 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989, microfilm), p. 1, reel 1. Frame numbers are not available for the Magic Summary reels.

[5]Ibid., "April 25, 1942," SRS-0582, p. 2, reel 1.

[6]Ibid.

offensive and felt secure enough from Japanese attack to resume its demands for the return of the concessions, Japan remained unyielding in its refusal to fulfill the April 1941 promise.

As Tokyo stalled the liquidation of the oil and coal concessions, another issue came to the forefront which Japan and the Soviets linked to the concessions. In 1928, Japan and the U.S.S.R. had concluded a Fisheries Convention which regulated Japanese fishing in Soviet waters. The original agreement had been concluded for an eight year term. Upon expiration of the 1928 convention, the Japanese and Soviets agreed to a series of six provisional treaties, each extending the Japanese fishing rights for one year. The latest provisional agreement was signed in January 1941, during the post-Nomonhan period when Soviet-Japanese relations remained relatively amicable. This treaty was to be replaced at the end of the year by a new fisheries convention. Japan maintained that the liquidation of the North Sakhalin concessions was contingent upon the successful conclusion of a new fisheries treaty. On the other hand, the Soviet Union demanded that Japan's liquidation of the oil and coal concessions would facilitate the conclusion of another fisheries convention. This apparent impasse still existed even as both sides entered preliminary negotiations for a new fisheries convention.[7]

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[7]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 80-81, 93.

The preliminary negotiations took place during 1941, but were hampered by a key difference in opinion. Unlike in its negotiations for the return of the oil and coal concessions, Moscow took a firmer stance with its demands regarding the fisheries convention. This stance developed through a basic difference in attitude taken by the Japanese and the Soviets. Japan believed that it had a right to fish in Soviet waters, but the Soviet Union stated that the right derived solely from the 1928 treaty. The Soviet envoy in these negotiations, Deputy Foreign Commissar Solomon Lozovskii, stated that if the treaties were allowed to expire, then the Japanese right to fish in Soviet waters would likewise expire.[8]

From this basic difference, several other problems accrued during the fisheries negotiations. Throughout 1941, while the German offensive continued, Japan attempted to gain better terms than past provisional agreements had allowed. The Japanese even went so far as to insist upon a limit to Soviet state fishery production. In this way the Japanese attempted to use the German military pressure upon Moscow in Europe to extract privileges from the Soviet Union. However, Lozovskii argued that a limit on Soviet operations in its own waters was an internal matter and could not be made part of any agreement with a foreign

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[8]Ibid., 97.

power.[9] The Soviets were apparently going to be less conciliatory when negotiating issues directly related to Soviet national interests. Although return of the North Sakhalin concessions were of concern to the U.S.S.R., at present the concessions legally belonged to Japan. But the Soviets could control the fishing rights in their own waters. After months of deadlocked negotiations, a seventh provisional treaty had to be signed on 20 March 1942. Both sides expressed their desire that a new permanent treaty could be concluded before 1943.[10] However, a December 1942 message from Tokyo summed up the Japanese position with regards to all negotiations with the Soviet Union: "We don't want to get cheated."[11]

These negotiations mirrored the changing balance of the war in favor of the Allied powers. Even though Japan and the Soviet Union pledged a mutual desire for a new long-term fisheries convention, two years would pass before a treaty could be concluded. This delay could be attributed to the fact that Japan did not recognize the June 1942 battle of Midway as turning the tide of war in the Pacific. Rather, many Japanese officials thought that 1944 was the decisive year. Perhaps the fall of the Marshall Islands in January

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[9]Ibid., 96.

[10]Ibid., 100.

[11]"Magic Summary, January 1, 1943," SRS-0824, p. 6, reel 4.

1944, but certainly by the time of the battles of the Philippine Sea and Leyte in June and October 1944 respectively, Japan's hopes of regaining the upper hand were lost.[12] The shift in the strategic scale of World War II in both theaters against the Axis coalition thus aided the settlement of both the North Sakhalin concessions and the fisheries convention issues.

The German invasion of the U.S.S.R. in June 1941 further influenced the critical role Soviet-Japanese relations were to play in World War II. Several months passed before Japan decided its official position vis-a-vis the German-Soviet contest. It will be remembered that at the time of the Tripartite Pact negotiations before September 1940, Japan had insisted upon letting each nation decide whether or not to declare war. Japan now fully exercised that right. Germany desired a Japanese attack and Tokyo often gave assurances during 1941 that it would indeed attack the Soviet Union.[13] One of the chief proponents of Germany's pleas for a Japanese attack was Japan's ambassador in Berlin, Hiroshi Oshima. Tokyo finally informed Oshima on 27 July 1942 that Japan would not attack the Soviets.[14] Even so, Oshima persisted. As late as January 1943, Oshima sent the following to Tokyo, "I now once again plead that

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[12]Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender, 41-43.

[13]Boyd, Hitler's Japanese Confidant, 60.

[14]Ibid., 63.

you most seriously consider attacking the Soviet Union."[15] Had Japan in fact invaded the Soviet Union instead of deciding upon a southern advance policy, the nature of World War II would have been vastly different. No amount of speculation, however, could ever predict the outcome had a combined German-Japanese attack been made. Therefore, Soviet-Japanese relations following the Nazi invasion of the U.S.S.R. played a crucial role in the determining the nature of World War II.

With Japan's decision not to attack the Soviet Union and Germany's failure to defeat the Soviets, Japan sought to rectify the situation by negotiating a separate Soviet-German peace. Japan clearly foresaw that the longer Germany took to defeat the Soviets, the less chance there was that the Soviet Union would fall at all. Japan further realized that the more Germany expended itself against the juggernaut of the U.S.S.R., less would be available to meet the Anglo-Americans elsewhere in Europe. Besides freeing the bulk of the German military machine to face Britain and the United States, a German-Soviet peace would undermine Anglo-American attempts to get Moscow to enter the war against Japan.[16]

Japan continually attempted to mediate a Soviet-German peace throughout World War II. The first Japanese attempt

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[15]"Magic Summary, January 28, 1943," SRS-0859, p. A2, reel 4.

[16]Boyd, Hitler's Japanese Confidant, 140.

was made on 21 November 1941.[17] However, both Berlin and Moscow resisted repeated Japanese efforts. Japan's position regarding a Soviet-German peace was made plain in a January 1943 message from Foreign Minister Masayuki Tani to Berlin:

> Ever since the outbreak of the [Pacific] war, the Imperial Government has felt that it would be advantageous to Japan, Germany, and Italy in their war efforts if Russia could be taken out of the anti-Axis camp. To this end Japan has watched for an opportunity to effect a German-Russian peace . . . we are giving fresh study to the possibilities and terms for peace.[18]

Japan's efforts further intensified in 1944 as the war in Europe continued to weigh heavily upon Germany. The Japanese were under no illusion about their own chances for victory either. A July 1944 report from Japan's military attache in Bucharest presented this gloomy, but accurate appraisal of the war, "We Japanese must give up all idea of expecting anything from Germany. Japan, unaided, must now stand or fall on her own."[19] A separate Japanese report on the war, dispatched 17 August 1944 from Japan's military attache in northern Italy, elaborated upon the situation in Europe:

> We must recognize the fact that the Anglo-Americans and the Russians are not likely to commit any serious errors in the prosecution of the war . . . . Therefore, if the Germans continue to fight on three fronts against such powerful enemies, they

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[17]Ibid.

[18]"Magic Summary, January 15, 1943," SRS-0838, pp. 1-2, reel 4.

[19]Ibid., "September 26, 1944," SRS-1437, pp. 1-2, reel 11.

> must inevitably go down to defeat on all those fronts . . . and in addition we must refrain from indulging in wishful thinking and in optimistic estimates of our own strengths.[20]

Here, in their own words, was Japan's assessment of the only plausible outcome to the war in Europe. The German invasion of the Soviet Union had been unsuccessful. Perhaps, if Japan could conclude a Soviet-German peace agreement, the German situation would not appear so grim.[21] However, all attempts to negotiate a separate peace had failed thus far. Japan also recognized its own fate in the Nazi downfall, the Tripartite Pact had linked the two nations in a do or die situation. Thus, once Nazi Germany surrendered, Japan would stand alone to face the brunt of the Allies. With such a grim assessment of Germany's and its own chances for victory, Japan concluded that the only way to salvage the situation was to redouble its efforts to effect a Soviet-German peace.[22] One week after the above report reached Tokyo, Ambassador Oshima in Berlin was instructed to inform Nazi leaders of Japan's view that Germany should make peace with the Soviets.[23]

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[20]Ibid., "September 24, 1944," SRS-1435, pp. 1-2, reel 11.

[21]"Japan as Mediator in the Russo-German Conflict," SRH-067, pp. 6-7, reel 9, frs. 0497-98.

[22]Ibid.; and "Japanese Estimates of Germany's Ability to Continue the Struggle," SRH-068, pp. 1, 12, reel 9, frs. 0512, 0524.

[23]SRS-1435, p. 4, reel 11.

No matter how much Japan desired to effect an end to the Soviet-German war, neither Germany nor the Soviet Union appeared interested. In Germany, the Japanese government utilized Ambassador Oshima in this matter. Oshima reported in September 1944 that there was little possibility of a Soviet-German peace.[24] The Japanese diplomat sent a similar message two months later in November, when Oshima stated that although there are some in Germany who wish to see a separate peace, "the official German view is that peace with Russia is impossible."[25] Japan continued, however, to question the possibility of a Soviet-German peace into 1945.

The Soviet Union was likewise unwilling to conclude a separate peace. In fact, the Soviets sought a no-separate-peace agreement with the United Kingdom on 12 July 1941.[26] Stalin was always cold to the idea of a Soviet-German peace. This attitude grew stronger as the German invasion was turned back. Throughout 1943 and until Germany's capitulation in May 1945, Moscow refused to consider any Japanese proposal that hinted of a separate peace. This was made clear when in October 1944, Ambassador Sato in Moscow was told that Germany had requested Japan represent German interests in the Soviet Union. Sato was instructed to

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[24]Ibid., "September 30, 1944," SRS-1441, p. 2, reel 11.

[25]Ibid., "December 6, 1944," SRS-1508, pp. 1-2, reel 11.

[26]Boyd, Hitler's Japanese Confidant, 67.

inform Moscow and to report upon the Soviet response.[27] Three weeks later, on 17 November 1944, Foreign Commissar Molotov informed Sato that the Soviet government could not allow Japan to represent German interest in the Soviet Union. Molotov reasoned that Soviet interests received no protection in Berlin and thus Germany could not expect such representation in Moscow. The Soviet diplomat made these remarks knowing that Sweden had been empowered to represent Soviet interests in Germany.[28] Thus, Japan was unable to take even the first steps toward mediating a separate peace between the Soviet Union and Germany. Realistically, Japan appeared to be the only nation that even desired to see a separate peace evolve. Germany and the Soviet Union obviously wanted no part in a separate Soviet-German reconciliation.

As the pressure upon Germany increased, Japan's desire for a Soviet-German peace increased. Likewise, as the pressure in the Pacific mounted against Japan, the island nation became more conciliatory toward the Soviet Union in order to resolve outstanding problems. By 1944, therefore, Japan was willing to compromise in order to settle the oil and coal concessions as well as the fisheries convention questions.

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[27]"Magic Summary, October 22, 1944," SRS-1463, p. 7, reel 11.

[28]Ibid., "October 25, 1944," SRS-1497, pp. 6-7, reel 11.

The negotiations for the liquidation of the North Sakhalin concessions demonstrated Japan's weakened international position due to the strategic shift in the war against the Axis powers. The primary discussions for the liquidation of the oil and coal concessions on North Sakhalin were carried on between Soviet Vice Commissar Lozovskii and Japan's Ambassador Sato in Moscow.[29] Beginning in December 1943, specific terms were discussed as to the conditions for Japan's liquidating the concessions. Japan continually insisted upon a monetary compensation. Moreover, Japan also demanded that the Soviet Union furnish a yearly supply of oil and coal over a five year period. Initially, the Japanese made grandiose monetary compensation demands which the Soviets flatly rejected. However, Japan's primary concern remained the supply of oil and coal which it had demanded. The Japanese desired these shipments to begin immediately while the Soviets stated that it was impossible to do so until after the Pacific War had ended.[30] Along with this basic difference in the time table, the amount to be delivered was also a delicate issue. Japan desired 200,000 tons of oil per year while the Soviets offered 50,000 tons per year. Japan regarded the Soviet offer as totally unsatisfactory.[31] However, a January 1944 U.S.

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[29]Ibid., "January 23, 1944," SRS-1189, p. 3, reel 8.

[30]Ibid., pp. 5-6, reel 8.

[31]Ibid., p. 6, reel 8.

intelligence report noted, "Although it is apparent from the foregoing that a number of issues remain to be settled before the various [concessions and fisheries] agreements can be signed, Japan is apparently prepared to yield on any given point rather than allow the negotiations to bog down."[32] This assessment showed the importance Japan placed upon maintaining amicable relations with the Soviet Union and the weakened state of Japanese diplomacy as a result of the strategic shift of the war toward the Allies. Later events in the negotiations proved this appraisal. On 26 January, Lozovskii reiterated the Soviet offer to provide Japan with 50,000 tons of oil a year for five years after the end of the war. Furthermore, the Soviet Union would make one payment of slightly more than four million yen as full monetary compensation for the liquidation of the oil and coal concessions. Upon reporting the Soviet demands to Tokyo, Sato commented, "Russia is apparently no longer particularly anxious to maintain friendly relations with Japan . . . , the Soviet policy is to take advantage of our weakness."[33] The Japanese government decided to conclude the agreement at any cost on 2 February 1944 and advised Ambassador Sato to accept the Soviet terms on 3 February. The Japanese were in no position to withhold the return of

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[32]Ibid., p. 7, reel 8.

[33]Ibid., "February 15, 1944," SRS-1212, pp. 4-5, reel 8.

the oil and coal concessions any longer. The promise had been made in April 1941, and broken for nearly three years. The time had come to relinquish the upper hand to the Soviet Union.

Simultaneously, the Japanese demonstrated an equally conciliatory attitude when negotiations began over the Soviet-Japanese fisheries agreement. A seventh provisional fisheries treaty had been signed in March 1942. An eighth was concluded on 25 March 1943, and when negotiations of a permanent treaty resumed in the fall of 1943, the chief Japanese objection to the Soviet auction system remained the critical obstacle.[34] Japan continued to urge modification of the existing auction system, but thus far the Soviets were evasive on the issue. Rather than risk stalling the negotiations althogether, discussion then moved to other matters. In early December 1943, the Soviets requested that Japan cease operations off the North Sakhalin and Kamchatka coasts for the rest of the Pacific War. The Soviet position was that Japanese vessels might attract hostilities from Anglo-American submarines, thus endangering Soviet shipping. Japan acceded to the Soviet demand. Thus, the shift in the balance of the war influenced the fisheries negotiations as it had the talks over the North Sakhalin concessions. Furthermore, the Japanese agreed to relinquish ten percent

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[34]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 100-101.

of the fishing lots that it had held during 1943.[35] Therefore, the only virtual stumbling block was the auction system and the successful negotiations for the liquidation of the oil and coal concessions.[36] Japan's willingness to yield to Soviet demands demonstrated the conciliatory attitude the island empire was forced into as a result of the strategic shift in the Pacific War.

March 1944 proved to be an important month in the life of wartime Soviet-Japanese relations. During the month both the oil and coal concessions protocol and the fisheries convention were signed. First, the oil and coal concession agreement was initialed on 10 March 1944. This was fulfillment of another Soviet demand that the liquidation protocol be concluded prior to the fisheries convention.[37] Soon thereafter, on 19 March 1944, a new five-year fisheries protocol was initiated. Both sides made important concessions in regard to concluding the new treaty. The Soviets agreed to a modified auction system in which Japan was guaranteed to hold all lots on which it operated factories. Japan for its part accepted further Soviet

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[35]SRS-1189, pp. 3-4, reel 8.

[36]"Magic Summary, February 4, 1944," SRS-1201, p. 8, reel 8. The U.S.S.R. made it clear that the fisheries pact would not succeed if the concession negotiations failed.

[37]Ibid., "March 18, 1944," SRS-1244, pp. 5-6, reel 8. The complete text for all documents pertaining to the liquidation of the North Sakhalin concessions are provided on pp. B1-B9.

demands to limit the fishing off key Soviet coastlines for the remainder of the war.[38] With both protocols initialed, the formal signing of both documents took place on 30 March 1944.[39] After months of difficult and frustrating meetings, the Soviet Union and Japan had finally settled two major outstanding problems. Besides being burdened by demands and counter-demands by both sides, it took the deterioration of the war situation in Europe and the Pacific to facilitate the agreements being made. One side needed to be militarily weaker in order for the other side to be in a position of diplomatic superiority. In this case, the Soviet Union held the upper hand and served to gain more from the arrangements than did Japan.

The strategic shift in the war precipitated another major shift in the Soviet policy toward Japan. This change became public as a result of a speech made by Stalin in November 1944. On 6 November 1944, Stalin openly characterized Japan as an "aggressive nation" and likened Japanese early war victories to those of Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.[40] In his report to Tokyo on the speech, Ambassador Sato stated that "So far as Japan is concerned, I do not think that this speech will lead at once

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[38]Ibid., "March 31, 1944," SRS-1257, p. 3, reel 8.

[39]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 102.

[40]"Magic Summary, November 9, 1944," SRS-1481, p. 6, reel 11.

to any undesirable results . . . [however] we will have to expect a stiffening in Russia's attitude toward us."[41] Shortly after the speech was made, Sato gained an interview with Foreign Commissar Molotov. When asked if Stalin's speech represented a change in Soviet policy toward Japan, Molotov replied, the reference to Japan as an aggressive nation was "made from a theoretical point of view and dealt only with past history."[42] The Soviet diplomat's reply should not have allayed Japan's concern. However, Sato reported that he had gone into the interview with a sense of uneasiness, but due to Molotov's cordial nature, left the meeting believing no change in Soviet policy toward Japan had occurred.[43] Hopeful that Sato's comments were true, many Japanese officials in Tokyo entered 1945 with a false sense of security.

Furthermore, Japanese foreign policy remained unchanged toward the Soviet Union. Japan was determined to strengthen its relations with the Soviets thereby guaranteeing Soviet neutrality in the Pacific War. Japan should have realized that Stalin's speech reflected the current war situation and the U.S.S.R.'s strengthening of ties to the Allied coalition. Moreover, Molotov's weak rationalization should

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[41]Ibid., "November 10, 1944," SRS-1482, p. 4, reel 11.

[42]Ibid., "November 21, 1944," SRS-1493, p. 2, reel 11.

[43]Ibid., "November 22, 1944," SRS-1494, p. 3, reel 11.

have only served to heighten the growing feeling of uneasiness that Sato had felt before the meeting took place instead of calming the ambassador's fears. Japan would have realized the change in Soviet attitude had it operated with a clear focus. Instead, the Japanese government and its diplomats exaggerated any positive sign from the Soviet Union as hope to salvage the island empire's desperate plight as the final year of the war approached.

CHAPTER V

THE BITTER END, 1945

U.S. intelligence studies proved that the Japanese were under no illusions as the first months of 1945 unfolded. In a year which would witness the abrogation of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, the capitulation of Nazi Germany, and the Soviet entry into the Pacific War, Japan scrambled for a solution to the mounting pressure of wartime defeats. The previous year had witnessed the fall of the Tojo cabinet, thus affording more moderate Japanese authorities the ability to begin the unenviable task of terminating the war in the Pacific. Obviously, Soviet-Japanese relations were influenced as a result of these sweeping changes. These revisions of Soviet-Japanese relations were witnessed by U.S. cryptanalysts who decoded much of Japan's Tokyo-Moscow diplomatic radio traffic. Therefore, U.S. signals intelligence afforded timely documentation of these Soviet-Japanese relations as the final year of World War II commenced.

The Japanese misinterpretation of Soviet foreign policy, which had existed in 1944, continued into 1945 with more severe consequences. In February 1945, Tokyo passed along instructions to Ambassador Sato in Moscow that further misdirected Soviet Japanese relations. After the Yalta Conference, 4-11 February 1945, Foreign Minister Shigemitsu instructed the ambassador to gain an interview with Soviet

Foreign Commissar Molotov. The Japanese diplomat was charged with attempting to get as much information as possible about what had transpired at Yalta and to determine any change in the Soviet attitude toward Japan as a result. If Sato did not observe any change, the ambassador was to question Molotov on the possibilities of extending the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact for another five years.[1] These instructions, though well meaning, presumed a certain amount of Soviet good faith which had not been typical in Soviet-Japanese relations of the past, by either side. The nature of diplomacy dictated a certain amount of secrecy and for the Japanese to believe that Sato, though an experienced diplomat, could extract a "confession" of Soviet policy from Molotov, another experienced diplomat, was absurd. Even so, Sato met with Molotov in late February.

Ambassador Sato allowed Shigemitsu's instructions to influence his opinion of Soviet intentions, and this in turn led Sato to make a severe false conclusion. When Sato obtained a meeting with Molotov on 22 February, he was disappointed by the results. The Japanese ambassador failed to learn any significant details concerning the Yalta conference, including any hint of the Soviet agreement to enter the Pacific War against Japan after Germany's defeat. In fact, Molotov denied the rumor that Japan had been

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[1]"Abrogation of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact," SRH-071, p. 1, reel 9, fr. 0580.

discussed at all. Although Sato had gained little information from the foreign commissar, the ambassador was satisfied that Soviet policy toward Japan remained unchanged as a result of the Yalta Conference.[2] Sato's erroneous conclusion had serious repercussions in April 1945, when the Japanese were surprised by the Soviet abrogation of the Neutrality Pact.

During the same 22 February interview, Sato made another error in judgement. As a result of his deduction that Soviet policy remained unaltered, Sato broached the subject of renewal of the neutrality pact as per Tokyo's instructions. Molotov responded by stating that he personally was deeply satisfied with Japan's inquiry, but that the Soviet Union must defer discussion on this matter until a later date. The foreign commissar reasoned that "This question is related not only to European problems, but to many other problems as well."[3] Therefore, Sato had to be satisfied with Molotov's promise to have an official reply as soon as possible. The Japanese diplomat left the interview with the impression that the Soviets finally were prepared to enter discussions concerning the extension of the neutrality pact. However, such a view was not justified. Sato was extremely anxious to begin discussions and thus over emphasized any positive side of his meeting

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[2]Ibid., pp. 1-2, reel 9, frs. 0580-81.

[3]Ibid., p. 2, reel 9, fr. 0581.

with Molotov. In essence, Sato was willing to accept any sign from the Soviet Union that the neutrality pact would be renewed another five years.

Over the next few weeks, the Japanese foreign ministry attempted to reduce the number of possible "problems" that could impede the anticipated neutrality pact negotiations. One foreseeable problem included three Soviet vessels that had been captured in Hongkong when that city fell to the Japanese early in the war. Bolstered by early war victories, the Japanese had failed to return the ships to the Soviets. Instead, the Japanese military removed the ships' engines and equipment. Furthermore, these same ships had been damaged in December 1944 during a U.S. air raid.[4]

While attempting to remove this potential problem, Sato received closer insight into the changed Soviet policy toward Japan. Ambassador Sato requested a meeting with Molotov in late March. Sato was told that the foreign commissar was extremely busy with other visitors and would be unable to grant the request.[5] Instead, Sato gained an interview with Deputy Commissar Solomon Lozovskii on 24 March 1945. During this conference Sato proposed that the Soviet Union accept one of the interred vessels in exchange for a Japanese ship that had run aground near North Sakhalin a couple years earlier. Moreover, the Japanese were willing

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[4]Ibid., p. 4, reel 9, fr. 0583.

[5]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 127.

to buy the remaining two ships for 500,000 yen.[6] Sato told Tokyo that Lozovskii replied heatedly that it was impossible for the Soviet Union to sell ships when they were much needed by the Soviets themselves and berated the Japanese for waiting over three years before attempting to settle this delicate issue.[7] Lozovskii's strong attitude not only represented the shift in the strategic balance in the war, but also a change in the Soviet attitude toward Japan. The aggressive Soviet response forced Sato to rethink the predicted concessions that the Soviets would demand from the Japanese in exchange for the continuance of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, which Japan desperately desired.

The Japanese now believed that the "other problems" on which Foreign Commissar Molotov spoke on 22 February would be more serious than simply three interred cargo ships. In anticipating the list of Soviet demands for agreeing to the extension of the neutrality pact, Sato feared the worse. The ambassador concluded that the Soviet Union would use the opportunity of discussions over continued neutral relations between the two nations to erase any previous agreements disadvantageous to the Soviets. In three messages to Foreign Minister Shigemitsu dated 30 March, Sato expressed his belief that the U.S.S.R. would demand the abrogation of

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[6]SRH-071, p. 5, reel 9, fr. 0584. Foreign Minister Shigemitsu had informed Sato that the Japanese would be willing to go as high as two million yen.

[7]Ibid., pp. 5-6, reel 9, frs. 0584-85.

both the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905 and the Peking Treaty of 1925, in which the Soviets reaffirmed the Portsmouth Treaty. He believed, Sato continued, that the Japanese should accept these demands if the Soviets agreed to the proviso that any territorial transfers under those treaties would be unaffected. The ambassador reasoned that the remaining provisions in the Portsmouth Treaty had relatively little importance except for Japanese fishing rights in Soviet waters, which were protected over the next four years by the Fisheries Convention signed in March 1944.[8] These were the ideas that swirled around in Sato's mind when he received news at 1:00 P.M. on 5 April 1945 that Molotov desired to see him later that same day.

This historic interview represented a drastic change in Soviet-Japanese relations. Finally, Sato was granted the interview for which he had worked so hard; however, over a month of preparation did not ready the Japanese diplomat for what Molotov had to say. Sato called upon Molotov promptly at 3:00 P.M. He was well prepared with all possible arguments and counter-proposals. But before Sato was able to initiate discussions about continuing the neutrality pact, Foreign Commissar Molotov read the following statement:

The neutrality pact between the Soviet Union and

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[8]Ibid., p. 6, reel 9, fr. 0585. See Chapter 3 for a brief discussion of the 1944 Fisheries Convention.

> Japan was concluded on April 13, 1941, that was before the attack of Germany on the USSR and before the outbreak of war between Japan on the one hand and England and the United States on the other. Since that time the situation has basically altered. Germany has attacked the USSR, and Japan, the ally of Germany, is aiding the latter in its war against the USSR. Furthermore, Japan is waging war with the USA and England, which are the allies of the Soviet Union.
>
> In these circumstances the neutrality pact between Japan and the USSR has lost its sense, and the prolongation of that pact has become impossible.
>
> On the strength of the above and in accordance with Article Three of the above mentioned pact, which envisaged the right of denunciation one year before the lapse of the five year period of operation of the pact, the Soviet Government hereby makes known to the Government of Japan its wish to denounce the pact of April 13, 1941.[9]

Taken off-guard by this unexpected announcement, Sato expressed his hope that no drastic change would take place in Soviet-Japanese relations as a result of the abrogation. Molotov replied, "The Soviet Union does not believe that its notification with respect to the Neutrality Pact has brought about any change in the existing situation."[10] Apparently, the Japanese never considered the fact that the "existing situation" referred to by Molotov had caused the abrogation of the neutrality pact in the first place.[11] Ambassador Sato then reminded Molotov that even though both parties had the right to denounce the pact, the agreement remained in effect for the full five years. Molotov agreed before the Japanese

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[9]Department of State, "Soviet Denunciation of Pact with Japan," 811.

[10]"Russo-Japanese Relations, June 1945," SRH-079, p. 9n, reel 9, fr. 0720.

[11]Ibid.

ambassador that the pact did not expire until 25 April 1946, although the Soviets had agreed at Yalta to enter the Pacific War within ninety days after the fall of Germany.[12] Some Japanese diplomats held the opinion that a Soviet plot against Soviet-Japanese relations had been initiated at Yalta.[13] However, Japan remained ignorant of the Soviet agreement at Yalta until August 1945. Therefore, Japan believed that Molotov's statement was an attempt to strengthen the Soviet hand in negotiating concessions from the Japanese when the neutrality pact was scheduled for renewal the following April.[14] The fateful interview was over in twenty minutes, and Sato was left with the sad task of informing Tokyo.[15] Although the abrogation officially signalled the fact that the treaty would not be renewed by the Soviets for a second five-year term, Soviet-Japanese

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[12]Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers: The Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955), 984.

[13]U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Record Group 457, Records of the National Security Agency/Central Security Service, "Notes on the Crimea (Yalta) Conference," SRH-070, in Top Secret Studies on U.S. Communications Intelligence during World War II, pt. 2, The European Theater (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1989, microfilm), p. 7, reel 3, fr. 0231.

[14]Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender, 58-59, 90.

[15]Due to the Soviet Union's "unceremonious" attitude in quickly releasing the news of the abrogation, Tokyo learned of the denunciation from German and American broadcasts several hours before the news was reported by Sato.

relations became more tense as a result.

The reports from the shaken Japanese diplomat to Tokyo demonstrated the dire situation now faced by the desperate island empire. Sato explained that he had been so surprised by Molotov's statement that the ambassador failed to hear a part of the Soviet statement. Although he had been caught unaware, the Japanese diplomat admitted that the Soviet actions "could be supported on reasonable grounds" since the basic situation of April 1941 had changed.[16] Since that time, Japan and the Soviet Union, although on peaceful terms, had entered into wars against each other's allies. In another report to Tokyo, Sato further stated that he expected the Soviets to build up their military forces on the Machukuo-Siberian border and thereby force Japan into "a policy of obsequiousness based on fear." To meet this situation the ambassador suggested a basic policy of seeking "to maintain tranquil relations . . . to the very end."[17] The following day, 6 April, the Japanese foreign ministry issued instructions to various delegations to avoid any emotional comment regarding the Soviet denunciation and to avoid any expressions which would irritate the U.S.S.R.[18] All of this amounted to very little as a postwar United States government intelligence study concluded. With the

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[16]SRH-071, p. 10, reel 9, fr. 0589.

[17]Ibid., p. 12, reel 9, fr. 0591.

[18]Ibid., p. 15, reel 9, fr. 0594.

abrogation of the neutrality pact, the Soviet Union had obtained "a 'Damocles' sword' with which Russia may legally and blamelessly cut the remaining bonds at her discretion."[19]

Although it appeared obvious for the Japanese to interpret Soviet intentions, Japan misread the facts. This was not as difficult to imagine as it seemed. By April 1945, many Japanese officials within the island empire knew the war could not be won outright. Germany would collapse within a few weeks, leaving only the Japanese Empire to continue the struggle. However, Japan wished to avoid unconditional surrender at all costs. Thus, the island empire needed the U.S.S.R. to remain an open avenue of communications to the Allies. In this scenario, Japan lessened the ominous implications of Soviet policy. In other words, as long as Japan believed the Soviet Union was neutral in the Pacific War, Tokyo saw a possibility of avoiding unconditional surrender. Therefore, Japan inevitably convinced itself that the Soviet Union was negotiating in good faith.

On the same day as the fateful Soviet announcement, a drastic change occurred within the Japanese government. On 1 April 1945, the Allies had launched their invasion of Okinawa. Continued military setbacks combined with domestic political pressure forced the collapse of Prime Minister

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[19]Ibid., p. 17, reel 9, fr. 0596.

Kuniaki Koiso, in power since July 1944. Koiso had succeeded Tojo and had presided over a transition period in Japanese history, from the dominant military control of Tojo to the realization that Japan's bold venture of 1941 had indeed failed.[20] Ironically, the Soviet Union announced the abrogation of the neutrality pact on the same day as the fall of the Koiso cabinet. Admiral Kantaro Suzuki was selected as the next premier.

The Suzuki appointment represented another step away from an army dominated Tokyo government. The army, led by former premier Tojo, declared that Koiso's successor should be a general on active duty. The army clique felt that having an active duty general as the next premier could influence greatly the decisions of the new government to continue the war. However, Suzuki was neither a general nor even on active duty, he was a retired navy admiral. Even so, the jushin, the group made of former Japanese premiers who were responsible for nominating a succeeding premier, nominated Suzuki to form the next, and what was hoped to be the last, of Japan's wartime cabinets.[21]

The formation of the Suzuki cabinet resulted in another change in the face of Japanese diplomacy. Suzuki personally selected Shigenori Togo as foreign minister in the new

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[20]Maxon, Japanese Foreign Policy, 192-94; and Kase, Journey to the Missouri, 106-7, 140, 142.

[21]Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender, 62-63.

administration. Suzuki believed that Togo, who had been foreign minister in December 1941 and had resigned as a show of opposition to the Pearl Harbor attack, would work toward a termination of the war.[22] Togo represented another Japanese statesman who had long realized the fate of Japan had been decided. He had made sure, prior to accepting the mantle of foreign minister again, that his ideas about the termination of the war were supported by Suzuki. At first, Togo was hesitant, but once convinced that the new cabinet was going to pursue an end to the hostilities, Togo accepted the post.

Togo's task would be a difficult one, for following the abrogation of the neutrality pact, all indications showed that the Soviets were plotting a move against the Japanese. Soon after the collapse of Nazi Germany, 7 May 1945, the Soviet Union pushed ahead with plans to fulfill its agreement to enter the Pacific War. Japan gained timely intelligence of the massive transfer of Soviet military equipment and personnel from the European theater to the Soviet Far East through its diplomats abroad, such as Ambassador Sato. As early as June 1945, Sato relayed military intelligence reports back to Japan. Sato reported on 20 June that two Japanese couriers had observed a total of 166 eastbound trains carrying close to 120,000 troops and

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[22]Ibid., 66.

over thirty tanks during the week of 9-16 June.[23] The steady amount of Soviet eastbound rail traffic was maintained throughout July. Sato reported that during the first week of July, nearly 30 trains carrying troops and equipment were observed every day.[24] Another dispatch near the end of the month, 28 July, summarized the observations made by Japanese couriers in which 381 east-bound trains bearing 170,000 more troops were counted.[25] Likewise, Sato provided reports that the Soviet forces within Outer Mongolia were also being reinforced heavily.[26] The flow of Soviet military strength eastward during the summer of 1945 was an unmistakable sign that a Soviet invasion of Manchukuo was imminent.

The Soviet military build up in Asia represented the final nail in the coffin of the Japanese empire. By using timely intercepted Japanese diplomatic messages, a U.S. intelligence study reported, "Ambassador Sato saw the probability that Russia, availing herself of the golden

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[23]SRH-079, p. 11, reel 9, fr. 0722.

[24]"Russo-Japanese Relations, 13-20 July 1945," SRH-085, p. 18, reel 9, fr. 0811.

[25]Edward J. Drea, "Missing Intentions: Japanese Intelligence and the Soviet Invasion of Manchuria, 1945," Military Affairs 48 (April 1984): 68.

[26]Ibid.; and Carl Boyd, "Arlington Hall and Tokyo's Links with Berlin and Moscow, 1944-1945: The MAGIC Perspective of Japanese Relations with Germany and Russia during the Last Year of the War," in 1945: Consequences and Sequels of the Second World War, ed. Henry Rousso (Paris: Institut d'Histoire du Temps Present, 1995), 8.

opportunity to settle long-standing accounts, was 'planning to seize the power of life and death over Japan.'"[27] Moreover, Sato warned that whatever the Soviet Union decided to do, Japan would "be forced to dance to whatever tune strikes the Russian fancy."[28] The Japanese obviously were apprehensive about the Soviet military build-up.

The problem faced by the Japanese at this point was deciding when the Soviets would be prepared enough to commence its invasion. One article explains that during postwar questioning several Japanese officials claimed to have learned of the Soviet agreement made at Yalta to enter the Pacific War. However, this same author doubts the accuracy of these claims.[29] Even so, many Japanese reports accurately assessed the timetable for the Soviet invasion. As early as May 1945, a Japanese army lieutenant colonel estimated that the Soviets needed until August to be fully prepared to launch an attack. Likewise, Sato's 22 May message warned that July and August were the pivotal months. The normally stubborn Japanese Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ) reassessed an early 1945 report which stated the Soviets would not be prepared until spring 1946. The revised IGHQ made in July 1945 predicted the Soviet army

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[27]"Russo-Japanese Relations, 18 June 1945," SRH-078, p. 4, reel 9, fr. 0699.

[28]Ibid., p. 5, reel 9, fr. 0700.

[29]Drea, "Missing Intentions," 68. See Drea's note 34 for his dismissal of the claims.

would be ready around August.[30] These assessments stated the belief that the Soviet Union was prepared to enter the Pacific War, but needed time to transport the necessary materiel eastward. Once accomplished, the Soviet army would most likely invade Manchukuo first. Thus, Japan operated throughout the summer of 1945 knowing that one of the few nations that maintained neutrality in the Pacific War, and which offered the only possibility to avoid unconditional surrender, could at any moment draft a declaration of war. Nevertheless, Japan continued to pursue the Soviet Union to mediate an end to the Pacific War.

Japan's decision to approach the Soviets was based upon two key ideas. First, Japan hoped that the Soviet Union would take the opportunity, following the fall of Germany, to concern itself with Europe and domestic recovery and allow the Anglo-Americans to bear the brunt of the war. Second, Japan believed that the Soviets were interested in acting as mediator to end the war, thus gaining concessions from Japan without having to fight the bitter battles that were taking their toll on the Allies now on Okinawa. Therefore, the Soviet Union in fact would gain an international position superior to that of its allies. Sato thought that the Soviet price for acting as mediator would center around the dissolution of the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905, involving the return to the Soviets of South Sakhalin,

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[30]Ibid.

cancellation of existing fishing rights, return of Manchukuo to Chinese rule, transfer of Japan's lease from China to the Kwantung territory to the U.S.S.R., incorporation of Inner Mongolia into Soviet Outer Mongolia, transfer to the Soviets of the North Manchuria railroad and all other strategic railway lines in northern Manchukuo built by Japan. Moreover, the ambassador anticipated that it likely that the Soviet Union would challenge "the disposition of Korea and the question of China and other matters."[31]

Many Japanese officials shared the belief that a confrontation with the Soviet Union, militarily or diplomatically, would be inevitable in the next few months. Shunichi Kase, Japan's minister to Switzerland, echoed Sato's sentiments in a 14 May report to Tokyo that predicted any approach made toward the Soviet Union must be made "with a proposal for a general peace, asking for their help and offering them a considerable reward."[32] Japanese foreign relations with the Soviet Union during the summer of 1945 were predicated upon ending the war while minimizing the concessions extracted for using the Soviet good offices in the process.

The collapse of Germany encouraged Japan to begin sounding out the good offices of the Soviet Union for ending the war. Accordingly, it was along these lines that on

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[31]SRH-078, p. 4, reel 9, fr. 0699.

[32]Ibid., p. 5, reel 9, fr. 0700.

21 May Foreign Minister Togo's message to Ambassador Sato told him to see Foreign Minister Molotov "as soon as possible . . . and sound him out on Russia's intentions toward Japan," while attempting to gain any information about the recent San Francisco Conference. Eight days later, Sato was able to conclude a forty-five minute meeting with Molotov.

Ambassador Sato's account of the interview showed the Soviet's superior position with regard to Japan. Congratulating the Soviet victory over Germany, Sato expressed Japan's desire that "no important change would take place in Russo-Japanese relations." Sato added that Japan wished to end the Pacific War but due to the United States' insistence for unconditional surrender, Japan had "no choice but to continue to fight."[33] Molotov's reply was to reassure Sato that the U.S.S.R. was "not a belligerent." He went on to declare that the main concern of the Soviet Union was its domestic situation.

The Sato-Molotov meeting resulted in Sato's realistic plea to Tokyo. As to Sato's probing about the San Francisco Conference, Molotov simply stated that on the whole he had been satisfied. The meeting continued with discussions of Japan's outlook on the Pacific War. Sato diplomatically replied that Japan was determined to continue and that the war was being waged to free the southern regions from

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[33]Ibid., pp. 9-10, reel 9, frs. 0704-5.

European control. Concluding his report to Tokyo, Sato predicted that Japan was "facing future trouble with Russia . . . ." He suggested that Japan take immediate steps to resolve any present controversies. The ambassador even requested Togo to "please have the Cabinet or Supreme Council for the Direction of the War decide how far they are willing to go in making concessions to Russia."[34] So, within two months in early 1945, Japan's situation with regard to the Soviet Union had declined from delicate neutrality to intimidation with little hope of resolution.

The month of June 1945 began much the same as May had ended, with an alarmed foreign minister calling for a vigilant watch of the Soviet Union. Togo instructed Sato in Moscow not to miss any "opportunity to talk to Soviet leaders, as it was a matter of extreme urgency that Japan should not only prevent Russia from entering the war but should also induce her to adopt a favorable attitude toward Japan."[35] However, Foreign Minister Togo's 1 June instructions appear not to have made an impact upon Ambassador Sato. Sato had been depressed ever since 5 April, the abrogation of the neutrality pact, still maintaining his own guilt in that particular matter. Most of his recent conversations with Molotov, though cordial, were unproductive. After one week of inactivity in early

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[34]Ibid., p. 11, reel 9, fr. 0706.

[35]Ibid., p. 12, reel 9, fr. 0707.

June, Sato sent an extraordinary dispatch dated 8 June, with his "humble opinions as to the critical situation."[36]

The 8 June message contained Sato's frank opinions compounded by recent frustrations in Soviet-Japanese relations. The ambassador began by declaring that outside of maintaining neutral relations, he saw positively no hope of the Soviets showing an agreeable attitude toward Japan. Although continually instructed by Tokyo to sound out the Soviets time and time again, the U.S.S.R. had avoided becoming involved in negotiations of any sort because of their Anglo-American allies. The abrogation of the Neutrality Pact, 5 April 1945, gave a strong indication of the Soviet Union's lack of interest in Soviet-Japanese relations. Sato promised to do what he could and hoped that Togo would "sound out the Russian views in Tokyo from a special standpoint . . . and find an opening of some sort."[37] The ambassador's message continued, focused now on the present war situation.

Sato's forecast for the future of Japan in its present struggle was bleak. He claimed to believe that Japan could continue the war against America and England to the point that those two countries would become war weary. However, the ambassador explained that Japan's ability to continue

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[36]SRH-079, p. 6, reel 9, fr. 0716.

[37]Ibid., p. 6, reel 9, fr. 0717. There are two pages numbered as 6 within SRH-079.

hostilities was in jeopardy. Sato concluded this message with the prediction that if the Soviets should intervene in the war, "there would be no hope at all of saving the Empire's future." He went on to state that the Japanese army in Manchukuo was in no condition to oppose a Soviet invasion. Therefore, the clairvoyant Japanese diplomat predicted that "Japan would have no choice but to come to a decision quickly, fly into her [Soviet] arms, and resolving to eat dirt, to put up with all sacrifices in order to save the national structure."[38] Sato was a realist who dispensed with diplomatic courtesy when he reported to Tokyo the gloomy situation facing Japan. Frank B. Rowlett, a key U.S. cryptanalyst since 1930, once commented that Sato's intercepted messages in the summer of 1945 were the most rewarding intelligence he experienced.[39] Therefore, Sato's outlook on the war and his predictions should the Soviet Union declare war on Japan provided Tokyo an accurate appraisal of the deteriorating military situation resulting in a decline in diplomatic leverage.

While official channels through the Japanese embassy in Moscow proved unproductive, another avenue of approach in Soviet-Japanese relations seemed fruitful. Former premier Koki Hirota had been instructed to confer with Soviet

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[38]Ibid., p. 7, reel 9, fr. 0718.

[39]Boyd, "Arlington Hall," 9. These comments were made in a 14 February 1989 letter from Rowlett to Boyd.

ambassador to Japan, Jacob A. Malik. The early June message directed Hirota to try "to lead the Russians along" Japan's desired path.[40] In a 1 June message from Foreign Minister Togo to Ambassador Sato, Togo stated that as work progressed in Moscow, work would also begin in Tokyo. However, Togo felt that there were disadvantages with him talking directly to Soviet Ambassador Malik, and so the foreign minister delegated this job to Hirota.[41] Hirota mainly was limited to maintaining neutral relations with the Soviet Union and instructed to request the Soviet good offices for ending the war only as a last resort.[42] Not until 3 June was Hirota prepared to approach Ambassador Malik. This informal meeting led to a more official parley the next evening at Malik's hotel.

The beginning of the Hirota-Malik talks encouraged some Japanese officials. When Hirota met with Malik on 4 June, the Japanese official began by trying to convince Malik that the Japanese wished to promote friendly relations with the Soviet Union for the security of Asia. Ambassador Malik was skeptical and questioned Hirota whether these were the former premier's own personal views or that of the Tokyo

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[40]SRH-079, p. 5, reel 9, fr. 0715.

[41]SRH-078, p. 12, reel 9, fr. 0707.

[42]Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender, 91; and Herbert Feis, Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of the War in the Pacific (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 55.

government. Hirota replied that his opinions were the same as both the people and the government of Japan. Malik ended this initial dinner meeting by stating that the Soviet government would study the matter and Hirota would simply have to wait for the decision whether or not this avenue would be pursued.[43] The matter was effectively out of Hirota's and the Japanese Foreign Ministry's hands, but the former premier's foot was in the door. Although some Japanese were encouraged by the "progress" of the Hirota-Malik conversations, the Soviets always maintained the initiative over Japan.

As time passed, and no official Soviet reply was made, Japanese apprehension heightened. Nearing the close of June no reply had been forthcoming. The situation would resemble Sato's predicament prior to the Potsdam Conference when he would try in vain to initiate Soviet-Japanese negotiations. Even so, Japan now continued to push for a Soviet response. Twice, Foreign Minister Togo visited Hirota to press him to initiate another meeting with Malik. Against Hirota's warnings that the Soviets might view the haste as a sign of weakness, not necessarily in error, Hirota met Malik on 24 June. At this meeting, the former premier made several different attempts to begin negotiations. First, Hirota explained that Japan desired to finalize an agreement to replace the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact. Malik appeared

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[43]Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender, 91.

disinterested by this proposal. The ambassador told Hirota that the Soviet Union's recent abrogation of the pact in April did not indicate that the Soviets would cancel the final year of neutral relations between the two nation. Therefore, there was no need for another agreement. However, this statement insinuated that the U.S.S.R. had the ability to cancel the final year of peace if it desired. The second attempt was to negotiate a trade of Japanese rubber, tin, lead, and tungsten for Soviet oil. Malik dismissed this offer by stating that the Soviet Union did not have an oil surplus with which to trade. Hirota's third try, and most desperate attempt of all, was to suggest a unification of the Soviet army and the Japanese navy to form "the strongest powers in the world!" Malik balked and exclaimed that Hirota was merely stating the desire of the Japanese navy where as Japan's army might not share the same opinion.[44] Malik had countered Hirota at every turn, so the former premier left without any satisfaction for his efforts. Malik even inferred that there was no need for further meetings unless Japan presented a concrete plan.[45]

However, events proved that even a well-defined Japanese proposal failed to help the negotations progress. Hirota once again called on the ambassador five days later. On 29 June, Hirota handed Malik a concrete written proposal.

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[44]Ibid., 121-22.

[45]Ibid., 122.

The proposal offered Japanese concessions in exchange for a nonaggression treaty between Japan and the Soviet Union. Japan agreed to grant independence to Manchuria, renounce its fishing rights in exchange for Soviet oil, and discuss any matter of interest to the Soviet government.[46] After a brief discussion, Hirota left with a guarantee from Malik that this would be reported to Moscow and negotiations would be continued after Malik received a reply. This was the only commitment the ambassador made. However, as events proved, it was an empty gesture. Over the next two weeks Hirota attempted to gain a meeting with Malik. Malik claimed that he was ill and refused any conversations. All attempts having failed, Hirota passed along his condolences over Malik's "illness" and the negotiations simply ceased.[47]

As July 1945 began, events in Moscow continued to be unproductive. On 3 July, Ambassador Sato received an urgent dispatch from Togo. This message relayed the final proposal that Hirota had given Ambassador Malik on 29 June. Togo instructed Sato to do anything possible "to speed up their [Soviet] answer."[48] Sato, however, did not act upon the message with haste. Instead, the ambassador spent his time giving Tokyo his opinions on the recently concluded United

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[46]SRH-085, p. 1, reel 9, fr. 0794.

[47]Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender, 123; and Feis, Japan Subdued, 175.

[48]"Russo-Japanese Relations, 1-12 July 1945," SRH-084, p. 3, reel 9, fr. 0784.

Nations Charter. Sato believed that the basis of the charter was to prevent aggressive acts. He continued to say that since Japan was the only nation still fighting an aggressive war, the charter represented a diplomatic setback to maintaining good Soviet-Japanese relations. Therefore, the above mentioned message from Togo to Sato, received on 3 July, was not granted a reply until two days later. On 5 July, Sato sent another message to Tokyo containing his candid opinions on the futile attempts to lead the Soviet Union along Japan's chosen path.[49]

Nevertheless, Tokyo's patience with Sato's hesitation was nearly exhausted. No sooner had Ambassador Sato sent his message to Tokyo on 5 July, he received another of Tokyo's messages the same day. This urgent dispatch prodded Sato to press Foreign Commissar Molotov for an interview. Togo claimed that the fate of the entire Japanese Empire rested upon Sato's ability to arrange a meeting. However, Sato was not to be rushed. In a message to Japan dated 6 July, Sato explained that Molotov was extremely busy and was also preparing to leave for a conference in Berlin around 10 July. The ambassador felt that under the circumstances it would be difficult to obtain an interview before then.[50] It appeared that the ambassador and the foreign minister did not see the Soviet avenue nor the Japanese tactics at

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[49]Ibid., pp. 4-6, reel 9, frs. 0785-87.

[50]Ibid., pp. 6-7, reel 9, frs. 0787-88.

securing the Soviet good offices in the same manner. Thus, no progress was being made on either matter.

However, Togo was not yet ready to relinquish his efforts. The foreign minister dispatched an "Extremely Urgent" message to Sato on 9 July. This message exclaimed, "Your opinions notwithstanding, please carry out my orders." Later that same day, Togo sent another message. This time Togo attempted to convince Sato that the U.S.S.R. was ready to consider Japan's latest proposal. Togo felt that the time was right to once again remind the Soviet Union that Japan's proposal specifically stated that Japan was willing to discuss any matter of Soviet choosing.[51] Two days later, 11 July, Togo sent another secret dispatch that was again captioned "Extremely Urgent." It contained nothing new. Foreign Minister Togo reiterated that Sato should not confine himself to the above proposal, but should sound out the use of the Soviet good offices in ending the war. Togo's message continued to emphasize the concessions that Japan offered to the Soviet Union and hoped for a successful conclusion to the Hirota-Malik negotiations. Togo concluded with the statement that since this matter concerned the emperor, he would like a quick reply from the Soviet government. Thus, Sato was urged to meet with Molotov.[52]

The events surrounding the next meeting between Sato

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[51]Ibid., pp. 7-8, reel 9, frs. 0788-89.

[52]Ibid., pp. 8-9, reel 9, frs. 0789-90.

and the Soviet government revealed how far Soviet-Japanese relations had declined in importance to the Soviet Union. Not able to meet with the foreign commissar, because Molotov was making preparations for the upcoming Potsdam Conference, Sato gained an interview with Vice Commissar Alexander Lozovskii on 10 July. During this meeting, Sato continually urged for an immediate response to Hirota's proposal to Ambassador Malik. Lozovskii replied that he understood the situation, but was not aware that the proposal had yet received full consideration by the Soviet government. Lozovskii concluded that he would pass along Sato's wishes and a reply would be made.[53] The fact that the Hirota proposal, made two weeks prior to this conversation, had not received consideration showed the deterioration of Japan's position within the Moscow government. Had the Soviets been interested in the plan, they would have found the time to consider the proposal in detail and given the Japanese a reply.

This presumption was soon confirmed. The next day, 11 July, Sato was granted a twenty-minute meeting with Foreign Commissar Molotov. The short interview merely covered the same ground as Sato's meeting with Lozovskii the day before. Molotov stated that the proposal would be studied. Sato also inquired as to the upcoming Three-Power Conference in Berlin, actually the Potsdam Conference. Molotov revealed

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[53]SRH-085, pp. 1-2, reel 9, frs. 0794-95.

no information other than the meeting was scheduled to begin around 15 July.[54] Thus, two more days of fruitless Soviet-Japanese conversations revealed no new circumstances which promised any hope for Japan. The Soviets remained non-committal throughout.

However, Tokyo continued to pressure Ambassador Sato to pursue the Soviet Union to end the war. On 12 July, Togo sent a message marked "Very Urgent" to the ambassador. The foreign minister sought to relay a letter from the emperor which stated that Japan wished to end the Pacific War. However, as long as the Anglo-Americans insisted upon the unconditional surrender of Japan, the Japanese Empire had no choice but to fight on for the honor and the existence of the national polity. Togo further explained that Japan's foreign ministry was prepared to send Prince Fumimaro Konoe as a special envoy to Moscow. Konoe would bear a letter from the emperor with the above statement. Sato was to inform Molotov of this and to get the approval of the Soviets. Sato was also told to ask for the Soviets to provide a plane to meet the envoy, thereby reducing the trans-Siberian travel time.[55]

The lack of a concrete proposal within the continuous instructions frustrated Sato and revealed the desperation under which Japan operated. When the ambassador received

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[54]Ibid., p. 3, reel 9, fr. 0796.

[55]SRH-084, pp. 9-10, reel 9, frs. 0790-91.

Togo's latest instructions, on 12 July, Sato immediately penned a reply to Tokyo stating his objections. The ambassador was not pleased by the 11 July directions to sound out the Soviets without revealing Japan's intentions. Sato believed that without a concrete plan to offer the Soviet delegations, his feeling of the Soviet reactions would be without basis. He recommended that the Japanese government first make up its own mind concerning a definite plan. With a decision made, Sato could approach the Soviets with a firm proposal that could lead to the end of the war, but not until the Japanese were resolute in their intentions.[56]

Here, the constant delays in message traffic between Sato in Moscow and the foreign ministry in Tokyo added to the frustration on both ends. Sato's last message mentioned above was made without the benefit of Togo's message which proposed sending Prince Konoe to Moscow. Both Sato and Togo blamed these delays upon the recent Allied bombing raids upon Tokyo. However, both officials failed to recognize, or ignored, the possibility that since Japanese messages used Soviet radio stations for transmission, the Soviets were disrupting passage. Nevertheless, Sato operated two to three days behind Togo's instructions, not merely because of the ambassador's own lack of confidence, but simply due to the fact that the instructions had not reached him earlier.

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[56]SRH-085, pp. 5-6, reel 9, frs. 0798-99.

Not knowing these facts, Tokyo regarded Sato's efforts with little satisfaction. Had Togo's 12 July dispatch been on time as reasonably expected, then the latest discourse between Sato and Tokyo could have been avoided. As it was, Sato did not receive the outline of the Konoe mission until 13 July. Once the ambassador received that message, however, he quickly sent a return dispatch that stated, "Although . . . Molotov's departure for Berlin is drawing extremely close, I shall do my best to fulfill your instructions."[57] Sato sought to see Molotov before the foreign commissar's departure. This was the most enthusiastic response Sato had made to any Tokyo dispatch throughout the summer of 1945. Finally, Sato believed that Tokyo had given him a concrete proposal with which to approach the Soviet government.

Sato was true to his word. The ambassador querried the Soviet foreign ministry, but was told that Molotov could not manage a meeting before leaving for Berlin. Sato was told that any matters of importance should be directed to Vice Foreign Commissar Lozovskii. Therefore, Sato went to see Lozovskii at 5:00 P.M. on 13 July. Sato handed the Soviet official the Imperial instructions translated into Russian and a confidential letter addressed to Molotov which disclosed the intentions of the Konoe mission. The ambassador asked the vice commissar to convey the letter

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[57]Ibid., p. 7, reel 9, fr. 0800.

immediately to Molotov. Lozovskii questioned Sato on the emperor's message and then admitted that he understood the Japanese desire for a speedy reply by the Soviets. Lozovskii continued by stating that some members of the Soviet government were scheduled to leave that very night and it would be impossible to make any reply before their departure. The vice commissar said he would attempt to convey the details by phone to speed up the reply.[58] Nevertheless, a speedy response never developed. Maintaining good relations with Japan obviously were not a priority, and had not been for some time.

Nevertheless, Sato hoped for successful results from the Soviet good offices. After the interview, Sato dispatched a letter to Tokyo. The ambassador's convictions were "that the Russians will agree . . . to the sending of a special envoy, but it is difficult to say anything until we actually get a reply."[59] Sato also warned that if this proposal meets the same fate as past plans, it would be because of the lack of concrete details in Konoe's purpose.

Almost from the start, the Japanese proposal met with Soviet delay. Told on several occasions that the Soviet government officials, including Molotov, were leaving for Berlin on 13 July, Sato discovered that they had not actually left until the evening of 14 July. This would have

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[58]Ibid., pp. 7-8, reel 9, frs. 0800-1.

[59]Ibid., pp. 8-9, reel 9, frs. 0801-2.

given the Soviets a clear twenty-four hour period in which to review the recent Japanese proposal. However, the first Ambassador Sato heard from Vice Commissar Lozovskii after the 13 July interview was the evening of 18 July 1945. On that date Sato received a communication from Lozovskii stating that it was impossible for the Soviets to grant a reply because the Japanese intentions were merely given in a general form.[60] This evidence indicated that the Soviets were purposefully dragging their feet until returning from the Potsdam Conference. Moreover, the Soviets used the conference to inform the Anglo-Americans of the recent Japanese proposal.[61] Following the Potsdam Declaration that resulted from the conference, Japan knew that the Konoe mission would never be accepted. Therefore, the last Japanese effort to end the Pacific War that held even the most remote possibility of success ended before getting very far.

Finally, the results of the Three-Power Conference at Potsdam signaled the end to all Japanese hopes of a mediated end to the Pacific War. On 26 July 1945, the infamous Potsdam Proclamation was made. This statement called for

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[60]Ibid., pp. 10-11, reel 9, frs. 0803-4; "Russo-Japanese Relations, 21-27 July 1945," SRH-086, p. 1, reel 9, fr. 0819; and Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender, 126.

[61]Max Beloff, Soviet Policy in the Far East, 1944-1951 (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 103. The Japanese presumed that the western Allies would be informed of their latest proposal via the Soviet delegation at the Potsdam Conference, SRH-085, p. 11, reel 9, fr. 0804.

the unconditional surrender of Japan. The declaration stated that these terms would be the only terms considered. Soon after hearing the news, Japanese diplomats around the world declared that the Soviets knew of the Potsdam Proclamation before it was issued.[62] In fact, these assumptions were correct because Molotov attempted to delay the release of the Potsdam Proclamation, but was unsuccessful.[63] Therefore, the Potsdam Proclamation in effect ended any hope of a negotiated peace through the Soviet Union. The Soviets would not give up their postwar gains granted by the western Allies in exchange for any concessions given Japan. The Soviet Union probably never intended to make this trade, but maintained relations throughout the summer of 1945 in order to disguise its ultimate intentions of declaring war. Following the Potsdam Proclamation, Sato informed Tokyo that "[t]here is no alternative but immediate unconditional surrender if we are to try to make America and England moderate and to prevent [the Soviet Union's] participation in the war."[64]

As the events of August and early September 1945 showed, Japan ignored Sato's sound advice. On the morning of 8 August 1945, Ambassador Sato was informed that Molotov

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[62]"Magic Summary, 1 August 1945," SRS-1746, p. 4, part 1; and pp. 1-2, part 2, reel 15. This summary is divided into parts which are separately paginated.

[63]Beloff, Soviet Policy, 104.

[64]SRS-1746, p. 4, part 2, reel 15.

requested an interview at 5:00 P.M. Sato well remembered the last time the foreign commissar initiated talks--the result was the abrogation of the neutrality pact. As before on that fateful April day, Sato called upon Molotov on 8 August and Molotov immediately asked Sato to take a seat as the foreign commissar read a prepared statement:

> After the rout and capitulation of Hitlerite Germany, Japan remained the only great power which still stands for continuation of war.
>
> The demand of the three powers, United States, Great Britain and China, of July 26 this year for unconditional surrender of the Japanese armed forces was rejected by Japan. Thus, the proposal made by the Japanese government to the Soviet Union for mediation in the Far East war has lost all foundation.
>
> Taking into account Japan's refusal to capitulate, the Allies approached the Soviet government with a proposal to join in the war against Japanese aggression and thus shorten the period until the finish of war, to decrease the number of casualties, and contribute toward the most speedy restoration of peace.
>
> True to its obligation as an ally, the Soviet government accepted the proposal of the Allies and has joined the declaration of Allied powers of July 26 this year.
>
> The Soviet goverment considers this policy of hers is the only means capable of bringing nearer peace, to deprive the peoples of further sacrifices and sufferings, and give the Japanese people the opportunity to rid themselves of those dangers of destruction suffered by Germany after her refusal to accept unconditional surrender.
>
> In view of the above stated, the Soviet government declares as from tomorrow - that is, August 9 - the Soviet Union will consider herself in a state of war against Japan.[65]

Although Sato had been prepared for this news for a while, Molotov's declaration still shocked the ambassador. More-

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[65]"Japan's Surrender Maneuvers, 29 August 1945," SRH-090, p. 40, reel 9, fr. 0936.

over, Sato failed to realize that due to the difference in time zones between Moscow and Manchukuo, only a few hours separated 8 August from 9 August. Sato believed that he had still six hours of peace remaining when the interview ended. However, Soviet divisions poured into Manchukuo, northern Korea, and southern Sakhalin in the early morning hours of 9 August 1945, nearly six years after the battle of Nomonhan. The attack caught the Japanese "unprepared strategically, operationally, [and] tactically," wrote a leading historian on the war.[66] Elaborating upon this point, as late as 3:00 P.M., 9 August 1945, Tokyo had not received a report from Sato detailing Molotov's declaration of war. Foreign Minister Togo did not first receive an official announcement until Soviet ambassador Malik delivered the message shortly after 4:00 P.M. on 9 August. Meanwhile, the Soviet attacks had already begun.[67] Later that same day, the second atomic bomb was dropped. Japan had no choice but to surrender.

Even though Japan faced imminent disaster and ultimate surrender, several days passed before Japan accepted the unconditional surrender terms. Japan first attempted to surrender on 10 August. Minister Kase in Berne, Switzerland was charged with transmitting the surrender message to the Chinese and U.S. governments. The Japanese delgation in

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[66]Drea, "Missing Intentions," 70.

[67]"Magic Summary, 11 August 1945," SRS-1756, p. 8, reel 15.

Stockholm, Sweden similarly delivered the message to the Soviet and British governments.[68] However, the initial offer stated acceptance of the Potsdam Proclamation "with the understanding that the said declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler."[69] The next day, 11 August, U.S. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes acknowledged the receipt of Japan's offer, but stated that the authority of the emperor and the Japanese government to rule would be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers.[70] Accordingly, Japan accepted the Potsdam Proclamation on 14 August 1945, against strong military opposition. In fact, the emperor himself broke the deadlock in favor of surrender. The 14 August message read:

> [T]he Japanese Government have [sic] the honor to communicate to the Governments of the Four Powers as follows:
>
> 1. His Majesty the Emperor has issued an Imperial Rescript regarding Japan's acceptance of the provisions of the Potsdam Declaration.[71]

At 2:33 A.M. on 15 August 1945, Minister Kase transmitted to Tokyo the Allied acceptance of Japan's surrender offer.[72]

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[68]"Magic Summary, 10 August 1945," SRS-1755, pp. 3, 5, reel 15.

[69]Ibid., p. 2, reel 15.

[70]Butow, Japan's Decision to Surrender, 245.

[71]"Magic Summary, 14 August 1945," SRS-1759, p. 2, part 2, reel 15.

[72]"Magic Summary, 15 August 1945," SRS-1760, p. 1, reel 15.

The official surrender ceremony later took place in Tokyo Bay, 2 September 1945. The Pacific War finally was over.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

At high noon, Tokyo time, on 15 August 1945, Japan's emperor, through a phonograph recording, announced to the Japanese citizens that Japan had surrendered. Although, the official surrender ceremony was more than two weeks away, Japan at last had been brought to its knees. After more than a decade of warfare, beginning with the Japanese expansion into mainland China, next encompassing an undeclared war with the Soviet Union along the Manchukuo frontier, and lastly the Pacific War, Japan finally had capitulated.

Throughout the entire period, Soviet-Japanese relations weighed heavily upon Japanese policy decisions. The fighting during the 1930s helped convince Japan that its 1937 invasion of China would not result in a general war with Japan's communist neighbor to the north. Likewise, the fierce fighting at the Amur River, at Changkufeng, and especially at Nomonhan convinced Japan that the Japanese army could not fight both China and the Soviet Union at the same time. This realization led to the signing of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in April 1941. Under this agreement, the Soviet Union and Japan maintained a "strange neutrality" for nearly four years during World War II. Some authors, like Maurice Hindus, have likened the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact to the Soviet-German Nonaggression

Pact of 1939 in that the Japanese never intended to honor the treaty should a good opportunity to attack the Soviet Union become available.[1] Hindus believed that as Germany broke the Soviet-German treaty and invaded the Soviets, Japan would break the Soviet-Japanese pact at the earliest possible convenience. These events never presented themselves. Germany never conquered the Soviets in Europe and the Anglo-Americans turned the tide of war against the Japanese in the Pacific. Thus, the strategic scale of the war shifted in favor of the Allies. Even so, Japan remained at war with the U.S.S.R.'s allies while the Soviet Union remained at war against Japan's allies for nearly three more years.

With the strategic scale shifted against the Axis camp, Japanese policies were predicated upon two key ideas. First, "doing its utmost to encourage Germany to remain in the struggle," and secondly, improving upon Soviet-Japanese relations.[2] These two ideas were intertwined because many Japanese, including the Ambassador Oshima in Berlin, believed that the capitulation of Germany meant the fall of Japan as well. The Japanese realized that with Germany out of the war, it was only a matter of time until the Soviet

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[1]Hindus, Russia and Japan, 4.

[2]"The Problem of the Prolongation of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, 12 February 1945," SRH-069, p. 8, reel 9, fr. 0547.

Union turned its military upon Japan.[3] The abrogation of the neutrality pact, April 1945, provided the casus belli for the Soviet declaration of war. In abrogating the treaty Molotov stated that Japan actively had been aiding Germany, the enemy of the Soviet Union. Therefore, Japan had failed to maintain strict neutrality, thus providing the Soviets with a reason for its declaration of war in August 1945.

Beginning in April 1942, the Japanese ambassador to the Soviet Union, Naotake Sato, provided the Tokyo government with accurate information concerning the war in Europe and Germany's waning chances for victory. However, the intercepted intelligence surrounding Sato's messages from 1942 until the defeat of Germany are still largely classified and so his true value remains a mystery.[4]

Following the surrender of Nazi Germany, however, Sato obviously was an invaluable asset to the Tokyo government. The ambassador provided a realistic assessment of Japan's own chances for victory. In the summer of 1945, Sato wrote a lengthy plea to Foreign Minister Togo in which he assessed Japanese foreign policies, past and future:

> 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 . . . .
>
> Ever since the conclusion of the Anti-Comintern Pact (1936) our foreign policy has been a complete

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[3]Boyd, "Arlington Hall," 3.

[4]Ibid., 4.

> failure. The fundamental reason for this situation has been the division of the world into two camps - pro-Axis and anti-Axis - [and] as a result of our having taken sides with Nazism . . . .
>
> While it is a good thing to be loyal to the obligations of honor up to the very end of the Greater East Asia War, it is meaningless to prove one's devotion by wrecking the State . . . .
>
> Our people have to pant for a long time under the heavy yoke of the enemy . . . (but) after some decades we shall be able to flourish as before . . . .
>
> Immediately after the war ends, we must carry out thoroughgoing reforms everywhere within the country. By placing our Government on a more democratic basis and by destroying the despotic bureaucracy, we must try to raise up again the real unity between the Emperor and his people . . . .[5]

In this one message, the honesty, passion, and emotion of Ambassador Sato is realized. Likewise, his value to the Japanese government was as genuine.

Once Tokyo came to the realization that the struggle to win the war was in vain, Japanese policies changed. A U.S. intelligence study stated that in the late summer of 1945, Japan's policies had two main goals. These objectives were to prepare the Japanese citenzry for defeat and to find the best means to avoid unconditional surrender.[6] Here again, Japan utilized Soviet-Japanese relations in order to effect these policy decisions. Following the Soviet abrogation of the neutrality treaty, Japan viewed the Soviet Union as the best avenue to secure a mediated peace and thus avoid the

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[5]SRH-086, p. 5, reel 9, fr. 0823.

[6]SRH-085, p. 22, reel 9, fr. 0815.

unconditional surrender policy of the western Allies. Therefore, the Soviet Union became the "best means" of saving the national polity. Unbeknownst to the Japanese, however, the Soviet Union had promised to declare war on Japan within three months after the fall of Germany; thus the U.S.S.R. was not an avenue for negotiating a peace.

Although the four years of World War II are remembered largely for the massive invasions, large-scale battles, and new weapons development, the peace that existed between the Soviet Union and Japan during this period influenced the nature of the war. Soviet-Japanese relations were tense and often hostile during this time, but actual warfare did not erupt until August 1945. Had either Japan or the Soviet Union broken the treaty prior to August 1945, the fate of the world could have been changed dramatically. The actual results of such an event are incalculable. Even so, Soviet-Japanese relations were a provocative aspect to a world in flames.

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APPENDIX A

PACT ON NEUTRALITY BETWEEN UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS AND JAPAN[1]

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, guided by a desire to strengthen peaceful and friendly relations between the two countries, have decided to conclude a pact of neutrality, for which purpose they have appointed as their Representatives:

the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics--

Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics;

His Majesty the Emperor of Japan--

Yosuke Matsuoka, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jusanmin, Cavalier of the Order of the Sacred Treasure of the First Class, and

Yoshitsugu Tatekawa, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Lieutenant General, Jusanmin, Cavalier of the Order of the Rising Sun of the First Class and the Order of the Golden Kite of the Fourth Class,

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[1]Department of State, "Soviet Denunciation of the Pact," 811-12.

who, after an exchange of their credentials, which were found in due and proper form, have agreed on the following:

ARTICLE ONE

Both Contracting Parties undertake to maintain peaceful and friendly relations between them and mutually respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of the other Contracting Party.

ARTICLE TWO

Should one of the Contracting Parties become the object of hostilities on the part of one or several third powers, the other Contracting Party will observe neutrality throughout the duration of the conflict.

ARTICLE THREE

The present Pact comes into force from the day of its ratification by both Contracting Parties and remains valid for five years. In case neither of the Contracting Parties denounces the Pact one year before the expiration of the term, it will be considered automatically prolonged for the next five years.

ARTICLE FOUR

The present Pact is subject to ratification as soon as possible. The instruments of ratification will be exchanged in Tokyo, also as soon as possible.

In confirmation whereof the above-named representatives have signed the present Pact in copies, drawn up in the

Russian and Japanese languages, and affixed thereto their seals.

Done in Moscow on April 13, 1941, which corresponds to the 13th day of the fourth month of the 16th year of Showa.

V. Molotov.

Yosuke Matsuoka.
Yoshitsugu Tatekawa.

DECLARATION

In conformity with the spirit of the Pact of neutrality concluded on April 13, 1941, between the U.S.S.R. and Japan, the Government of the U.S.S.R. and the Government of Japan, in the interest of insuring peaceful and friendly between the two countries, solemnly declare that the U.S.S.R. pledges to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of Manchoukuo, Japan pledges to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of the Mongolian Peoples Republic.

Moscow, April 13, 1941

On behalf of the
Government of the U.S.S.R.
V. Molotov.

On Behalf of the
Government of Japan
Yosuke Matsuoka.
Yoshitsugu Tatekawa.

APPENDIX B

FRONTIER DECLARATION[1]

In conformity with the spirit of the Neutrality Pact concluded April 13, 1941, between the U.S.S.R. and Japan, the Governments of the U.S.S.R. and Japan, in the interests of ensuring peaceful and friendly relations between the two countries, solemnly declare that the U.S.S.R. pledges to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of Manchukuo, and Japan pledges to respect the territorial integrity and inviolability of the Mongolian People's Republic.

Moscow, April 13, 1941.

Signed on behalf of the Government of the U.S.S.R. by:

[MOLOTOV]

On behalf of the Government of Japan by:

YOSUKE MATSUOKA,
YOSHITSUGU TATEKAWA.

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[1]Lensen, Strange Neutrality, 279.

VITA

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