

Zenshiro Hoshina, *Daitoa Senso Hishi: Hoshina Zenshiro Kaiso-roku* [Secret History of the Greater East Asia War: Memoir of Zenshiro Hoshina] (Tokyo, Japan: Hara-Shobo, 1975), pp.139-149.

Section 5: The Emperor made *go-seidan* [= the sacred decision] – the decision to terminate the war

[H]ere I will report the conversation that actually took place during the council, the Supreme War Council, held in an air-raid shelter at the Imperial Palace on the late night of the same day. (Note from the Hoshina memorandum: [the council started] at 11:30 P.M. on August 9, 1945 ... )

Those present at the council in the Imperial presence were:

Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki (navy admiral)  
Minister of Navy Mitsumasa Yonai (navy admiral)  
Minister of Army Korechika Anami (army general)  
Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo  
Chief of the Army General Staff Yoshijiro Umezu (army general)  
Chief of the Navy General Staff Soemu Toyoda (navy admiral)  
President of the Privy Council Kiichiro Hiranuma  
Chief Cabinet Secretary Hisatsune Sakomizu  
Chief of Army Military Affairs Bureau Masao Yoshizumi (army lieutenant general)  
Chief of Navy Military Affairs Bureau Zenshiro Hoshina (navy vice-admiral)  
Chief of Cabinet General Planning Bureau Sumihisa Ikeda (army lieutenant general)  
Chief Aide-de-Camp to the Emperor Shigeru Hasunuma (army general)

The council in the Imperial presence [proceeded as follows]:

[The final text approved by the council was] “The Japanese Government is ready to accept the terms enumerated in the tripartite joint declaration which was issued on the 26th of last month, with the understanding that the said declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler.”

(Note: The original proposal by the Foreign Minister read as follows: “The Japanese

Government is ready to accept the terms enumerated in the tripartite joint declaration which was issued on the 26th of last month, with the understanding that the said declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the status of the Emperor under national laws.”)

Prime Minister Suzuki presided over the meeting (by the command of His Majesty). President of the Privy Council Hiranuma was summoned to the meeting by the command of His Majesty. Chief Cabinet Secretary Sakomizu read aloud the text of the Potsdam Declaration. The Prime Minister read aloud the draft meeting agenda and then explained the background of the proposed agenda.

[Prime Minister Suzuki:]

“The following conditions discussed by the Supreme War Council this morning were referred to the Cabinet Meeting [later this afternoon] without solving the final differences in opinion:

- (1) The terms will not include any demand regarding the Imperial House.
- (2) The Japanese military forces abroad will voluntarily withdraw and be demobilized.
- (3) The issue of war criminals will be dealt with by the Japanese government.
- (4) There will be no occupation of the Japanese territory to secure [the achievement of the objectives set forth in the said Declaration].

But the Cabinet Meeting could not reach a conclusion, either. [Therefore] six members [of the council] agreed that the agenda of the day would be the draft proposal by the Foreign Minister. (Note: The six members of the Supreme War Council were: Prime Minister Suzuki, Foreign Minister Togo, Navy Minister Yonai, Army Minister Anami, Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu, Chief of the Navy General Staff Toyoda) Three members had argued for the proposal developed during the Supreme War Council [, which included all four conditions]. (Note: Army Minister Anami, Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu, Chief of the Navy Genral Staff Toyoda). [But] there was a minority opinion that, though the first condition is indispensable, we should limit the number of conditions to the minimum, therefore the majority of the council agreed to adopt the Foreign Minister’s proposal as the basis of discussion.”

Foreign Minister Togo explained the purpose of his proposal:

“Although the Council had earlier decided that we could not accept the Declaration, the Cabinet

reached the conclusion that there would be no choice but for us to accept it in the current situation. We have to limit our demand to only those conditions that we absolutely cannot accept.

“The military situation is now more favorable to the United States and Britain given the current state of the enemy forces and because of Soviet participation in the war, so it is difficult for us to demand that they change the terms of the ultimatum any further. From their standpoint, it seems there is no room for compromise through negotiations. Knowing that the Soviet Union decided to enter the war, ignoring the conditions that we had proposed to them, it is reasonable not to add too many conditions [to our acceptance of the declaration].

“More precisely, regarding the voluntary withdrawal of our military forces abroad, there can be an opportunity for us to raise the issue later when we negotiate the agreement on a ceasefire. Also, though it is hard for us to accept their terms, the condition about war criminals is not so essential as to justify the continuation of the war. However, our position about the Imperial House is non-negotiable, because it will be the fundamental basis for the future development of our nation. Therefore, it is essential that our demands focus upon this issue.”

Navy Minister Yonai stated his opinion by request:

“I totally agree.”

Army Minister Anami stated his opinion by request:

“I totally disagree. The reason is that our country is going to lose its life as a moral nation if we accept the Cairo Declaration, which includes the annihilation of the Manchurian state. Even if we have to accept the Declaration, we need to have the four conditions accepted. I especially cannot agree with an idea that we will make a unilateral proposition to an immoral nation like the Soviet Union. We should live up to our cause even if our hundred million people have to die side by side in battle. We have no choice other than to continue the war by all means. I am confident that we are ready for the battles. I am sure we are well prepared for a decisive battle on our mainland even against the United States. Our military forces stationed in foreign countries might not be willing to retreat unconditionally. There is also considerable sentiment among the people at home in fighting the war until the end, thus we may well face a civil war.”

Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu:

“I absolutely agree with the opinion of the Army Minister. We are prepared for a decisive battle on our mainland. Although the Soviet entry into the war is disadvantageous to us, we are still not in a situation where we should be forced to agree to an unconditional surrender. If we surrender unconditionally now, we have no excuse to make to those who have sacrificed their lives during the war. At the minimum, the four conditions proposed at the Supreme War Council this morning should be included before we make any concessions.”

President of the Privy Council Hiranuma spoke:

“I want to pose questions before expressing my own view. I have four questions altogether. To the Foreign Minister, I want to ask you about the development and the terms of the negotiations with the Soviet Union.”

Foreign Minister Togo replied:

“On July 13 we conveyed the thoughts of His Majesty, requesting [the Soviets] to mediate an end to the war in order to terminate it as soon as possible. Also we proposed the dispatch of our special envoy. We later pressed them for a reply, but we didn’t receive one.

“On August 7 we received a telegram to the effect that Foreign Minister Molotov would meet us at 17:00 on August 8. Last night, on the 8th, Foreign Minister Molotov rejected our request for an agreement and [the Soviet Union] declared war.”

Privy Council Minister (President of the Privy Council Hiranuma is referred to hereafter as Privy Council Minister):

“Did you propose anything specific to the Soviet Union?”

Foreign Minister Togo replied:

“We told them that we were going to propose specific conditions to them through our special envoy but we didn’t have a chance to do so.”

Privy Council Minister:

“Then why did the Soviet Union declare war against Japan?”

Foreign Minister Togo replied:

“I assume the Tass report indicates the true intention of the Soviet Union.”

Privy Council Minister:

“What about the allegation in the Soviet statement that the Japanese government formally rejected the tripartite declaration issued on July 26?”

Foreign Minister Togo replied:

“We didn’t take steps to reject it.”

Privy Council Minister:

“Then on what ground does the Soviet government claim we rejected it?”

Foreign Minister Togo replied:

“They must have imagined that we did.”

Privy Council Minister:

“There is a clause in the tripartite joint declaration which says that we inflicted cruelties upon prisoners. And what about the handing over of war criminals? Can we assume that this matter should be handled domestically?”

Foreign Minister Togo replied:

“There are quite a few precedents in which war criminals were handed over.”

Privy Council Minister:

“Foreign Minister, do you think that we can agree to hand them over?”

Foreign Minister Togo replied:

“In my opinion, we will have no alternative but to hand them over under certain circumstances. Our enemies consider that the disarmament of the military should be forcibly executed.”

Privy Council Minister:

“I also have questions for the Army Minister and the Chief of the Army General Staff.

“You claim that we can still pursue the war but I have doubts because air raids will go on every day and every night. And are you confident in our defense against atomic bombs? Also, please explain to us how to deal with the paralysis of public transportation caused by air attacks on the mainland.”

Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu replied:

“Though we haven’t made sufficient progress so far in dealing with air raids, we should expect better results soon since we have revised our tactics. But there is no reason we should surrender to our enemies as a result of air raids.”

Privy Council Minister:

“I want to ask the Navy Minister what measures you have taken against bombardment from offshore battleships (against enemy task forces).”

Chief of the Navy General Staff Toyoda:

“We had plans to attack enemy task forces solely by planes but we couldn’t mobilize enough forces for it because we had to prepare for battles on the mainland. From now on, we will revise our plan of operations so that we will be able to defeat them with additional forces as necessary.”

Privy Council Minister:

“I want to ask the Prime Minister. It is essential to maintain domestic order, so what measures do you plan to take [in this regard] in the future? What is your plan regarding the food situation? It is getting really bad. The [domestic] situation these days is gradually getting closer to the point where we have to be seriously concerned. We should also think about the possibility of domestic disturbances, not by ending the war, but by continuing the war.”

Prime Minister Suzuki replied:

“I absolutely agree and I am also worried.”

Privy Council Minister:

“There is no room for further consideration but, since we are at a critical moment, I would like to express my own opinion. I agree with the Foreign Minister’s proposal in essence. I have the same opinion that what matters most is the preservation of the *kokutai* [= literally “body of the nation”]. But there is one part in this draft text where the terminology is very wrong. It is not legitimate to imply that the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler are derived from national laws. The essence of the Imperial rule was not established by the Constitution; the Constitution merely describes it. In terms of wording, I propose the text be changed to read: ‘[the declaration] does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler.’

“Next, regarding the four conditions, while the Foreign Minister says that the enemy will not allow any negotiation about these conditions, what the Army Minister and the Chief of the Army General Staff have argued sounds reasonable to me. If there is no hope for negotiations or if we are confident in our plan of operations, we must continue the war.

“[At the same time,] His Majesty has a responsibility to the Imperial ancestors. If this [foundation of our nation] should be shaken, His Majesty’s responsibility would be grave. Those of us in the position of giving advice to him would also deserve a thousand deaths.

“Therefore, I suggest that we decide based on the development of the situation and the prospect for the future. We should take into full account whether the situation today is acceptable. We won’t be able to solve this problem simply by force of arms. We also won’t be able to pursue the war if we ignore the people.

“In summary, I argue that we must push forward if we are confident; if not, we will not be able to continue the war however strong our Army and Navy are. And we have to preserve the *kokutai* and maintain the Imperial House at any rate, even if the whole nation must die in the war.”

Chief of the Navy General Staff Toyoda:

“The Navy General Staff mostly agree with the opinion of the Army Minister and the Chief of the Army General Staff. Though I can’t say that we will succeed without doubt, I am confident that we will be able to inflict major damage on the enemy. There are some people at home who still have a burning passion for war while morale among many others is low.”

Prime Minister Suzuki:

“I deeply regret that we could not reach a consensus despite the deliberations for many hours. This matter is extremely important and it is indeed a critical question as the President of the Privy Council described. Since opinions are still divided, we have no choice but to ask for the *seidan* [= sacred decision].”

The Prime Minister stood up and walked in front of His Majesty, then declared that “we would ask for *go-seidan* and accept His Majesty’s opinion as the final decision of the council”.

Here is what His Majesty said in his *go-seidan* (according to the Hoshina memorandum):

“Regarding our response to the Allied Powers, I have the same opinion as the Foreign Minister has. In my view, foundation for the nation’s survival will remain as long as the Imperial House, the people and the national territory remain. We will risk losing everything if we continue a hopeless war. I have no expectation for victory after considering our material power compared to [the enemy’s] and various situations in and out of the country.

“I have been told that we have confidence in our victory but the reality doesn’t match our projections. For example, the Army Minister told me that the defense positions along the coast of Kujukuri Hama would be ready by mid August but it is not yet ready. Also I have heard that we have no more weapons left for a new division. In this situation, there is no prospect of victory over the American and British forces with such technological power. It is very unbearable for me to take away arms from my loyal military men and to hand them over to the Allied Forces as war criminals. But I should bear the unbearable from a broader perspective, following the example of the Emperor Meiji’s decision on the occasion of the Tripartite Intervention, so I decide this way in order to save the people from disaster and to bring about happiness to mankind around the world.”

After these words, I humbly observed His Majesty wipe his tears away with his hand in a white



glove. It was exactly at 2:30 A.M. on August 10.

Deeply moved by these words of His Majesty, those present at the council burst into wails. I was also present on the occasion, so I wailed together with the other participants and tears kept streaming down both of my cheeks. I am assured that this gush of an emotional cry came from our sincere intention to devote ourselves to the rebuilding of a new Japan with His Majesty's will in mind.

It is an ordinary reading of the Constitution that His Majesty will follow the advice of the cabinet. I presume that His Majesty overruled the Constitution in making *go-seidan* because he was determined to terminate the war by his own decision in this exceptional case.

Just after the Imperial council, His Majesty sent the following message to Chief of Army Military Affairs Bureau Yoshizumi through Chief Aide-de-Camp to the Emperor Hasunuma: "I am ready to go to the Imperial Headquarters or anywhere else to announce that it is my will to end the war if either the Army Minister or the Navy Minister has difficulty in persuading his subordinates. So tell the Army and the Navy [if it is necessary]."

I received the message from Chief of Army Military Affairs Bureau Yoshizumi, so I said, "I think the Navy should be alright, but how about the Army?," to which he replied that Army Minister Anami intended to ask His Majesty to come over. Then Navy Minister Yonai clearly stated as follows when I went to ask for his decision: "Both the Navy Minister and the Army Minister have responsibility to give advice to His Majesty. If a minister cannot handle the matter with his own capacity, he should tell His Majesty that he cannot carry out his responsibility to advise His Majesty and resign. I will have to resign as the Navy Minister if I need to ask for His Majesty's visit." I was impressed anew that the minister was a great person. After I conveyed this message to Chief of Army Military Affairs Bureau Yoshizumi, Army Minister Anami also agreed with the Navy Minister's opinion, so he replied to His Majesty that His Majesty's visit to the Imperial Headquarters would not be necessary. Then a Cabinet Meeting decided to agree with the Imperial decision following His Majesty's will and a telegram to the effect that we accept the Potsdam Declaration was sent at 7 A.M. on August 10 via Switzerland and Sweden. In this telegram, we conditioned our acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration upon "the understanding that it does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a sovereign ruler".